

A COLUMBUS of SPACE

By Garrett P. Serviss

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We watched the meteors out of the windows while Edmund kept guard at the peep-hole. We must have come almost within striking distance of a thousand in the course of an hour, but Edmund decided not to diminish his speed.

CHAPTER I

A Marvelous Invention



DUNCUND STONEWALL was the most ingenious man that ever lived.

In my private opinion he was the greatest human being that has ever appeared on this earth. I say this, despite the fact that against my will, and without my knowledge at the start, he took me and two of our friends in common on the wildest, craziest, most impossible and incredible adventure that ever imagination conceived.

I ought to hate Edmund Stonewall for what he did to me and to my friends; but, in fact, I reverence his memory.

Let me tell you the story, and then you will see the reason that underlies my feeling toward him.

In the first place, he made the most wonderful invention that ever the world heard of. In fact, until now the world never has heard all about it, and I shudder yet when I think of it.

It was, of course, based on electricity, for everybody knows now that electricity is at the bottom of everything. It came out of that discovery which made so much excitement at the beginning of the twentieth century—"radioactivity."

What is radioactivity?

Heaven only knows. But it came near being the death of me; it has robbed me of my dearest friends; and I don't know but that, if Stonewall had kept on, it might have put a finish to this old earth of ours!

Stonewall was always bothering himself about "power" and "energy" and what not. He knew machinery and engines as a boy knows craps and marbles. But he was dissatisfied with everything.

"Men are fools," he said. "They might be like gods. They ought to run the globe, and steer it where they like."

You remember the old "Keeley motor?" Well, Edmund believed in it, but said Keeley had got hold of the wrong end, and would never make it go that way.

All the while he was experimenting himself. He had money from a rich uncle, I guess, and he built himself a laboratory, and once in a while he would invite Jack Ashton, Henry Darton, Will Church, and me to come and watch some of his experiments. It was all Greek to us, but it never failed to make us stare. We saw some wonderful things there, that people knew nothing about. Edmund took up Tesla, too, with his communication with Mars idea, but after a while he dropped that, and then came "radioactivity."

Radium and Thorium and Atomic Energy

WHEN the discovery of radium in uranium ore, and other things came out, the rest of us would never have known anything about it but for

Edmund. We used to skip that part in the papers, and I can't say that his explanation made it much clearer; but, anyhow, he made the thing very inspiring to our imagination.

"Listen to this, boys," he said to us. "Here's Professor Thomson declaring that a single grain of hydrogen contains in its padlocked atoms enough energy to lift a million tons three hundred yards high. But Professor Thomson doesn't know how to get at the energy, and neither does Professor Rutherford, nor Lord Kelvin. *But somebody has got to get at it, and I guess it will have to be me.*"

"But what would you do with it if you got it, Edmund?" asked Jack in his good-natured, drawing manner.

Edmund's eyes shone strangely, but he replied only:

"I would do what Archimedes dreamed of."

None of us knew anything about the dreams of Archimedes, and we dropped the subject.

But Edmund Stonewall did not drop it. He simply went to work at it. He used to be at our club every evening, but after he got this new idea we would not see him for weeks on end. And when we did see him he was as mum as an oyster. But what a look he had in those deep eyes! Somehow, with all his eccentricity, we never connected the idea of craziness with Stonewall. He was different from other human beings, that was all.

One evening, after a long absence, Edmund suddenly turned up at the club, and mighty glad we were to see him. We couldn't understand his talk half the time, but it charmed us just the same. We never laughed at his extraordinary ideas. There was a depth in him that awed us. This time he showed an animation that we had never noticed before.

"Well, boys," he said, shaking hands all round, "I've got it."

"Got what?" drawled Jack.

"The interatomic energy under control. I've arrived where a certain Professor Duncan dreamed of being when he wrote that, 'when man knows that every breath of air he draws has contained within itself power enough to drive the workshops of the world, he will find out some day, somehow, some way of tapping

THIS story is a classic by the well-known scientist and writer, Professor Serviss. It is one of the first real scientific space-flying stories ever written, and remains one of the best. The story was originally published in 1909, and caused a small sensation at that time. About that time radium and atomic energy theories came into public vogue, and this gave a great impetus to the imagination. Even today, seventeen years after the story was first published, it remains a scientific masterpiece, it being unnecessary to make any corrections whatsoever to bring it up to date. With true prophetic vision, Professor Serviss has penned a masterpiece that will remain so for generations to come. There is not a paragraph which is not packed full of interest. This story will keep you in constant suspense.

that energy.' I've tapped it."

"Indeed!" said Jack. "Well, as I asked you once before, what are you going to do with it?"

I have just been telling you that we never thought of making fun of any of Stonewall's ideas, but there was something so extravagant in his words and manner that we all fell into Jack's half-bantering mood, and united in demanding:

"Yes, Edmund, tell us what you are going to do with it?"

Unintentionally we nettled him and, without knowing it, we probably laid the foundation for the astounding thing that happened to us. He did not

reply for a moment, while his eyes flashed and his face darkened. Then he said slowly:

"If you will come over to the laboratory I'll show you what I am going to do with it."

A Talk at the Club

NOTHING could have suited us better. Ever since Edmund had shut himself away we had been curious to know what he was up to. We all got our hats and walked over to the laboratory. He led us directly into the back yard, which we were surprised to find walled and roofed, so as to form a huge shanty. Edmund opened the door and ushered us inside.

I tell you, we were startled by what we saw. In the center of the place was the queerest-looking thing you can imagine. It was not anything that I can well describe. I will call it a car, for that is what it most resembled. It was about eighteen feet long and ten feet high and broad, round like a boiler, with bulging ends. It seemed to be made of polished steel.

Edmund opened a door in the end.

"Step in," he said, and unhesitatingly we obeyed him, all except Church, who was always a skeptical fellow, and who, for some reason, remained outside.

Edmund turned on an electric light, and we found ourselves in an oblong chamber, beautifully fitted up with fancy wood and with leather-cushioned seats all round the sides. The walls shone with polished knobs and handles.

"Sit down," said Edmund, "and I'll tell you what I've got here."

Then, missing Church, he called out to him to come in, but there was no answer. We concluded that Church, thinking the thing would be too deep to be interesting, had gone back to the club. Edmund presently resumed:

"As I told you a little while ago, I've solved the mystery of the atoms. I've power illimitable at my command. If I chose to build the right sort of apparatus, I could drive this old planet of ours against the moon and wreck it! But I'm not going to damage anybody or anything. I'm simply going to try a little experiment. Excuse me a moment."

Thereat he stepped outside, and we looked at one another, wondering, but still having too much confidence in Edmund to really set him down in our minds as unbalanced. We rather thought that he was going to show us some wonderful thing, as he used to do in the laboratory; something we couldn't understand, but that would be interesting to look at. We were not prepared for what followed.

We heard Edmund outside in the shanty, making a noise that sounded like the opening of a barn door. Then he reappeared, entered the car, and closed its door.

We watched him with growing curiosity. There was an odd smile on his face as he reached at and touched a polished knob.

Instantly we felt that the car was rising. It rocked a little, like a boat in wavy water. We were startled, but not frightened.

A Visit to Edmund Stonewall's Laboratory

"**W**ELL, Edmund, what kind of a balloon is this?" Jack asked in his careless way.

"It's considerable more than a balloon," was the short reply.

We saw him touch another knob, and felt that the car had come to rest though it still rocked gently. Then Edmund unlocked a shutter at one side, and disclosed a many-paned window of thick glass. We all sprang to our feet and looked out. Below us were roofs and the tops of trees.

"We're about two hundred feet up," said Edmund. "What do you think of it?"

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" we all exclaimed.

"But," persisted Jack, "what are you going to do with it?"

Again Edmund's eyes flashed, and he said:

"You'll see!"

The scene out of the window was beautiful. The city lights were nearly all below our level, and away off over the New Jersey horizon I noticed the planet Venus, near to setting, and as brilliant as a diamond. I am something of a star-gazer, and I called Edmund's attention to the planet, as he happened to be standing beside me.

"Fine, isn't she?" he said. "Finest world in the solar system. And Schiaparelli says she's got two sides to her, one side always daylight and the other always night."

I was surprised at his exhibition of astronomic lore, for I had never known that he had given any attention to the subject. But a moment later all this was forgotten, for Edmund suddenly pushed us back from the window and closed the shutter.

"Going down again so soon?" asked Jack, a little banteringly as before.

Edmund smiled. "Going," he said simply, and put his hand on one of the knobs, pressing it gently. We felt ourselves moving very slowly.

"That's right, Edmund," Jack put in again. "Let us down easy; I don't like bumps."

Annihilating Gravity

WE all expected at every instant to feel the car touch the cradle from which it had started; But we were mistaken. What really did happen can better be described in the words of Will Church, who, you will remember, had been left outside in the shanty. I got the account from him long afterward. He had written it out and put it in a safe as a sort of historic document.

Here is Church's narrative, omitting the introduction, which read like a lawyer's brief:

"When we went over from the club to Stonewall's laboratory, I dropped behind the others because the four of them took up the full width of the sidewalk. Stonewall was talking to them, and my attention was attracted by something uncommon in his manner. I can't describe it very well, but there was an indefinable carriage of the head which suggested to me the thought that everything was not exactly as it should be.

"I don't mean that I thought him crazy, or anything of that kind, but I was convinced that he had some scheme in his mind to fool us. I bitterly repented, when things turned out as they did, that I had not whispered a word in the ears of the others. But that would have been difficult, and, besides, I didn't think that the

matter was anything serious. Nevertheless, I determined to stay out of it, so that the laugh should not be on me, at any rate. Accordingly, when the others entered the car I kept away, and when Stonewall called me I did not answer.

"As he closed the door of the car, for the first time the impression came to me that it might be something serious, but it was then too late to interfere. I was greatly astonished when, without the slightest apparent reason, the car began to rise in the air. I hadn't taken it for anything in the nature of a balloon, and this wasn't the kind of practical joke I was looking for, though if I had not been so stupid I might have guessed it when I saw Stonewall open the roof of the shanty.

"It was with much trepidation that I saw the thing, which really looked diabolical with its polished sides glinting in the electric light, rise silently through the roof, and float mysteriously upward. I felt relieved when it stopped at a height of a couple of hundred feet, and I said to myself that they would soon drop down again, and perhaps, after all, they would turn the laugh against me for being afraid.

A Narrative of One of the Participants

BUT in a little while the car began to move again, slowly rising, and shining like some mail-clad monster in the light of the arc-lamps below. An indefinable terror commenced to creep over me, and I shivered as I watched the thing.

"It moved very deliberately, and in five minutes had not risen more than five hundred feet. Suddenly it made a dart, and seemed to shoot skyward. Then it circled, like a strange bird taking its bearings, and rushed off westward, until I lost sight of it behind some tall buildings. I ran out into the street, but could not catch sight of it again.

"They were gone! I almost sank upon the pavement in my helpless excitement. A policeman was passing:

"'Officer! Officer!' I said. 'Have you seen it?'

"'Seen what?' asked the bluecoat, twirling his club.

"The car—the balloon,' I stammered.

"I ain't seen no balloon. I guess yer drunk. Y'd better git along home.'

"There was no use trying to explain matters to him, so I entered the shanty again, and sat down on the supports on which the car had rested. I remained a long time staring up through the opening in the roof, and hoping against hope to see them come back. It must have been midnight before I finally went home, sorely puzzled in mind, bitterly blaming myself for having kept my suspicions unuttered. I got to sleep, but I had horrible dreams.

"The next day I was up early, looking through all the papers in the hope of finding something about the mysterious car. But there was not a word. I watched for several days with the same result.

"I cannot describe my feelings. My friends

seemed to have been snatched away by some mystic agency, and the horror of the thing almost drove me crazy. Then members of their families—luckily none of them were married—began to come to me with inquiries. What could I say? Still believing that they would come back, I invented a story that they had gone off on a hunting expedition.

"But when a week had passed, and then two weeks, without any news, I was in despair. I had to give them up. Remembering how near we were to the coast, I concluded that they had drifted over the ocean and gone down. It was hard for me, after the lie I had told, to let the truth out at last.

"The authorities took the matter up and ransacked Stonewall's laboratory, and the shanty, without finding anything to throw light on the mystery. After a while the sensation died out, the papers ceased to talk about it, and I was left to my loneliness and my regrets.

"A year has now passed with no news. I write this on the anniversary of their departure. My friends I know are dead—somewhere. What an experience it has been! When your friends die and you see them buried it is hard enough, but when they disappear in a flash, and leave no token behind, it is almost beyond endurance."

CHAPTER II

A Trip of Terror

I TAKE up the story from the point where I dropped it.

As minute after minute elapsed, and we continued to move, we changed our minds and concluded that the inventor was going to give us a longer ride than we had anticipated. We weren't alarmed, for the car traveled so easily that it gave 'one a feeling of confidence. But we were a little indignant to think that Edmund should treat us like a lot of boys, without minds or wills of our own.

"See here," said Jack at length. "I'd be obliged if you'd tell us just what you're about. I've no objection to making a little trip in your car, which is certainly mighty comfortable, but I'd at least like to be asked whether I want to go or not."

Edmund made no reply, but busied himself with his knobs. First he pressed one and then another. Suddenly we were all jerked off our feet as if we had been in a trolley with a green motorman at the handle.

We felt ourselves spinning through space at a fearful rate. Still Edmund said not a word; but while we staggered to our feet, and steadied ourselves with hands and knees on the leather-cushioned benches, like so many drunken men, he clung to his knobs and pushed and twisted. The car slowed down then, and the motion became more regular.

The Beginning of a Lecture

EXCUSE me," said Edmund, quite in his natural manner. "The thing is a little new yet, and I've got to learn the stops by experience. But there's no occasion for alarm."

"Maybe there isn't," replied Jack. "But will you

be kind enough to answer my question, and tell us what you're about, and where we're going? I'd rather like to know."

Henry and I felt our indignation rising, and Henry broke out:

"See here! I've had enough of this! If you can't tell us what it all means, just go down and let me out. I decidedly object to being carried off in this manner against my will and knowledge."

By this time Edmund seemed to have got things in the shape he wanted, and he turned to face us. He always had a magnetism that was inexplicable, and we felt it then as never before. His features were perfectly calm, but there was a light in his eyes that seemed electric.

"It was my first intention," he said, "to make this expedition alone, in case I couldn't persuade you to go along. But you provoked me a while ago, and I made up my mind that I'd take you anyway. I'm not going to do you any harm, and you'll thank me for it before we're through."

"But where do you propose to take us?" asked Jack, who had rather more self-command than the rest of us.

"I'll show you," replied Edmund. And that, for the time being, was all that we could get out of him.

There was manifestly no use in making a fuss. We knew nothing about the management of the car, and couldn't even understand what the power was that moved it. Edmund's talk about interatomic energy was to us like calculus to schoolboys. We were in his hands, and depended absolutely upon him. He could do what he liked with us. If we had overpowered him, what should we have done next?

I saw that the only possible thing was to humor him. Besides, knowing him as we did, I couldn't feel that he meant to bring us to any harm. As I have told you, we never thought him crazy, and we didn't think so then. He evidently knew exactly what he was about, and we had to trust to him whether we wished to or not.

As I turned the thing over in my mind I became calmer. I thought that we could get something out of Edmund by quietly showing some interest and questioning him about the machine.

"What are all these knobs, Edmund?" I asked.

"They control the driving power," he replied in perfect good humor, but like a schoolmaster addressing pupils who, he knows, cannot entirely follow him. "I push or turn one way, and we go; I push or turn another way, and we stop or go back. So I concentrate the atomic power just as I choose. It makes us go, or it holds us motionless, or it carries us back to earth, according to the way I apply it.

"The earth is what I kick against, and what I hold fast by. Any other body in space would serve the same purpose. As to the machinery, you'd need an education in such things to understand it. You'd have to study the whole subject from the bottom up, and go over the experiments that I have made. I confess that there are some things the fundamental reason for which I don't know the real reason for myself. But I know that I have this power in control; and if I had Professor Thomson and Professor Rutherford here, I'd make them open their eyes!"

"I sure wish I had been able to kidnap them."

"So you admit that you've kidnaped us," said Jack; but he said it, I was glad to see, with a smile.

"If you want to put it that way—yes," Edmund responded, also smiling.

"Well, boys," said Jack, turning to Henry and me, "we may as well make the best of it, so far as I can see. Edmund has got us in his aerial craft, and we'll have to complete the voyage, whatever it may be. Perhaps you'll treat us to a trip to Paris, Edmund. I'd like that immensely."

"Better than that," said Edmund. "Paris is small potatoes compared with what you are going to see."

And so, indeed, it turned out!

A Comfortable Beginning of the Trip

FINALLY we all got our pipes and tobacco, and began to make ourselves at home. We dropped the subject that had been uppermost in our minds and talked of other things. Jack, always full of reminiscences, entertained us with stories. So hours glided by, till most of us began to feel sleepy.

"I'll have to keep the first watch," said Edmund; "and all the others, too, this night."

"So, then, we're not going to land to-night?" asked Henry.

"No, not to-night," Edmund replied. "You may as well turn in. You see, I've prepared good bunks."

He lifted the tops of some of the benches along the walls, and, turning them outward, showed us beds already made up.

"I believe I've not forgotten anything that can make us comfortable," he added. "Arms, instruments, clothing, furs, and lots of good things to eat."

We looked at one another in surprise, but nobody spoke, though the same thought probably occurred to each—that this promised to be a pretty long trip, judging from the preparations.

Arms! Edmund had said. What in the world should we need of arms? Was he going to take us off to the Rocky Mountains for a bear hunt? And clothing and furs!

But we were really sleepy. Perhaps the motion had something to do with that, although now it had become almost imperceptible. At any rate, it was not long before all three of us had taken Edmund at his word, and, leaving him to manipulate his knobs as he saw fit, we turned in. He considerately drew a shade over the electric light, and then noiselessly opened the shutter covering the window. When I saw him doing that, I was strongly tempted to rise and look out, but I didn't do it. Instead, I fell asleep.

The Earth Spread Out Like a Map

WHEN I woke, windows were open on both sides of the car, and sunlight was streaming in through one of them. Henry was still asleep, Jack was yawning in his bunk, just preparing to rise, and Edmund stood at one of the windows, staring out. I quickly made my toilet, and then went to Edmund's side.

"Good morning," he said, taking my hand. "Look

out here and tell me what you think of the prospect."

I put my face close to the glass, and my heart jumped into my mouth!

"Where are we?" I cried out.

Jack, hearing my agitated exclamation, jumped up and ran to my side.

It was truly enough to take away one's breath!

We seemed to be at an infinite height, and the sky was as black as ink and ablaze with stars, although the sunlight was streaming into the window behind us! I could see nothing of the earth. Evidently we were too high for that. It must lie away down under our feet, I thought, so that even the horizon had sunk out of sight. I had that queer, uncontrollable qualm that comes to every one who stands on the verge of an abyss.

Straight before us, so I presently became aware, was a most singular appearance in the sky. I thought at first glance that it was a round cloud, curiously mottled. But it was strangely changeless for a cloud, and it had, moreover, a certain solidity of aspect that could not consist with vapor.

"Good Heaven!" cried Jack, catching sight of it.
"What's that?"

"That's the earth!"

It was Edmund who had spoken, and now he looked at us with a quizzical smile.

Breakfast on Board, Far Up Above the Eastern Hemisphere

A THRILL shot through me. My mind went into a whirl. I saw that it was the truth he had told; for, as sure as I sit here, at the moment that Edmund spoke, the great cloud rounded out before my eyes, the deception vanished, and I recognized the outlines of Asia and the Pacific Ocean, as clearly as ever I saw them on a school-globe!

In another minute I had become too weak to stand, and I sank, trembling, upon a seat. Jack, whose eyes had not accommodated themselves to the gigantic perspective as rapidly as mine, remained at the window, declaring:

"Fiddlesticks! What are you trying to give us? The earth is down below, I reckon."

But in a little while he, too, saw the thing as it really was, and then his excitement equalled mine. In the meantime Henry, awakened by the noise, had run to the window, and had gone through the same experience. Our astonishment and dismay were too great to recover from, but after some minutes we gained a little self-control.

"In Heaven's name, Edmund," Jack at last exclaimed, "what have you been doing?"

"Nothing very extraordinary," Edmund replied coolly. "At least, nothing that ought to seem extraordinary. If men had not been fools for so many ages they might have done this long ago. They've been wasting their time with steam and coal and a hundred other petty sources of power, when all the while they had the limitless energy of the atoms under their thumbs and didn't know it. It's the interatomic energy that has brought us out here and that is going to carry us a good deal farther before we are through."

We simply listened in silence; for what could we say? There was not the shadow of a doubt about it; we were out in the middle of space, and there

was the earth hanging on nothing, like a summer cloud. Heaven knows how far away! It might have been a million miles, for all we could tell.

A Speed of 20 Miles a Second

"WE'VE made a pretty good run during the night," said Edmund, finding that we were speechless. "You must be hungry by this time, for you've slept late. Let's have breakfast."

So saying, he opened a locker, took out a folding table, covered it with a white cloth, turned on a little electric range, and in a few minutes had ready as appetizing a breakfast of eggs and as good a cup of coffee as I ever tasted. It is one of the compensations of human nature that it is able to adjust itself to the most unheard-of conditions provided that the inner man does not find itself neglected. The smell of breakfast would almost reconcile a man to purgatory; anyhow, it reconciled us, for the moment, to our situation, and we ate and drank and fell into as cheerful good comradeship as a fishing-party after a big morning's catch.

When the breakfast things had been cleared away, we began to smoke and chat, frequently interrupting the talk, however, to take a turn at the window, staring at the spectacle of the world we were leaving behind us. Edmund got out some binoculars, and with them we could recognize many geographical features.

We could see Japan and the Philippines, spots near the shore of the Pacific; we recognized the crinkling line of the snowy Himalaya Mountains; and a great white smudge over the ocean showed where a storm was raging, and where good ships were, no doubt, battling with the waves beneath.

I noticed that Edmund was continually going from one window to the other, as if watching for something; and there was, at times, a look almost of apprehension in his eyes. He had a peep-hole in the forward end of the car, covered with thick glass, and he frequently visited it. Even while we were at breakfast, I had observed that he was not easy, but kept jumping up and running to look out. At last I asked him:

"What are you looking for, Edmund?"

"Meteors," he replied shortly.

"Meteors out here?"

"Of course. You're something of an astronomer. Don't you know that they hang round all the planets? They didn't let me sleep last night. They kept me on tenter-hooks all the time. I was half inclined to get one of you up to help me. We passed some pretty ugly looking fellows during the night. You know, this is an unknown sea that we are navigating, and I don't want to run on a rock and wreck the ship."

"But we seem to be pretty far from the earth now," I said; "and there ought not to be much danger."

"It's not so dangerous as it was, but there may be some round yet. I'll feel easier when I've put a few more million miles behind us."

Millions of miles!

When we had imagined that the earth looked as though it might be a million miles away, it was merely a passing thought which didn't impress us with its real immensity; but now, when we heard

Edmund say that we actually had traveled such a distance, the idea struck us with overwhelming force.

Meteors on All Sides

"IN Heaven's name, Edmund," Jack called out, "at what rate are we traveling, then?"

"Just at present," Edmund replied, glancing at an indicator on the wall, "we're making twenty miles a second."

Twenty miles a second!

"Why," I exclaimed, "that's faster than the earth goes in its orbit!"

"Yes, just a trifle faster," Edmund replied, smiling. "But I'll probably have to work her up to a little better speed, in order to get where I want to go before our goal begins to run away from us."

"Ah! that's it," put in Jack. "That's what I wanted to know. What is our goal, Edmund? Where are we going?"

Before Edmund could reply we all sprang to our feet affrighted.

A loud grating noise had broken upon our ears. At the same instant the car gave a lurch, and a blaze like a flash of the most vicious lightning streamed through one of the windows.

"Blank the things!" shouted Edmund, springing to the window, and then darting at one of the knobs, and beginning to twist it with all his force.

In a second we were sprawling on the floor, except Edmund, who kept his hold. Our course had been changed with amazing quickness, and our startled eyes beheld huge misshapen objects darting past the window.

"Here comes another!" cried Edmund, seizing the knob again.

I had managed to get my face at the window, and I certainly thought that we were lost. Only a few rods away, rushing straight at us, was a vast black mass, shaped something like a dumb-bell, with ends as big as houses, tumbling over and over itself, and threatening us, as it came, with annihilation. If it hit us, as it seemed sure to do, I knew that we should never return to the earth, unless it might be in the form of pulverized cinders.

CHAPTER III

The Planetary Limited

BUT Edmund had seen the meteor and, quicker than thought, with a turn of the knob, he swerved the car, and threw us all off our feet again! But we would have been thankful to him even if he had broken our heads, for he had saved us from instant destruction.

The danger was not yet gone, however. Scarcely had the huge dumb-bell (which Edmund assured us afterward must have been composed of solid iron, from its effect on his magnetic needles) passed before there came from outside a blaze of lightning so fierce and penetrating that it closed our eyes as if the lids had been slapped shut!

"A collision!" exclaimed Edmund. "The thing has struck another big meteor, and they are exchanging red-hot compliments."

He threw himself flat on the floor, and stared out of the forward peep-hole. Then, immediately, he

jumped to his feet, and gave us another tumble. He had changed the course once more.

"They're all about us," he said. "We're like a boat in a raging spring freshet, with rocks, tree-trunks, and tossing cakes of ice threatening it on every hand. But we'll get out of it. The car obeys its helm as if charmed. Why, I got away from that last fellow by setting up an atomic reaction against it, as a boatman pushes his pole against an ice-floe."

A Trip to Venus

IN the midst of our terror we could not but admire our leader.

His resources seemed boundless, and our confidence grew with every escape. We watched the meteors out of the windows while Edmund kept guard at the peep-hole. We must have come almost within striking distance of a thousand in the course of an hour, but Edmund decided not to diminish his speed, for he said that he found he could control the car quicker when it was under full headway.

So we rushed, dodging the things like a crow in a flock of pestering jays, and after a while we began to enjoy the excitement. It was better sport than shooting rapids in an open skiff, and we got so confident at last in the powers of our car and its commander that we were rather sorry when the last meteor was passed, and we found ourselves once more in clear open space.

After that the time passed quietly. We ate our meals and slept as regularly as if we had been at home.

There was no night for us, because the sun shone in at one window or the other all the time; yet, as I have said, the sky was jet black, and the stars glittered everywhere round us. When we wanted to sleep we put up the shutters, keeping watch only through the peep-hole, which, as it did not face the sun, admitted little light. We kept count of the days by the aid of a calendar clock. There seemed to be nothing that Edmund had forgotten.

Once the idea suddenly came to me that it was a wonderful thing that we had not all been smothered with bad air, breathing the atmosphere of the car over and over again as we were doing, and I asked Edmund about it. He laughed.

"That's the easiest problem of all," he said. "Look here."

And he threw open a little grating in the side of the car.

"In there," he explained, "there's an apparatus which absorbs the carbonic acid and renews the air. It is good to work for at least a month, which will be more time than we need for this expedition."

"There you are again," broke in Jack. "I was asking you about that when we ran into those pesky meteors. What is this expedition? Where are we going?"

Taking Rifles to Venus

"WELL, since you have become pretty good shipmates," replied Edmund, "I don't see any objection to telling you. We are going to Venus!"

"Going to Venus?" we all cried in a breath.

"To be sure. Why not? We've got the proper sort of a conveyance, haven't we?"

There was no denying that. As we knew that we had left the earth far behind, and had already traveled some millions of miles, it didn't, after all, seem to be a very crazy idea that we might actually go to Venus.

"But how far is it?" asked Jack.

"When we quit the earth," Edmund replied, "Venus was rapidly approaching inferior conjunction. You know what that is, Albert," addressing me. "It's when Venus comes between the sun and the earth. The distance between the two is not always the same at such a conjunction, but I figured out that on this occasion, allowing for the circuit that we should have to make, there would be just twenty-seven million miles to travel. At the average speed of twenty miles a second, we could do that distance in fifteen days, fourteen, and one-half hours."

"But, of course, I had to lose some time going slow through the earth's atmosphere, for otherwise the car would have caught fire by friction, like a meteor, and I shall have to slow up again when we enter Venus's atmosphere, so that I don't count on landing on Venus in less than sixteen days from the time of our departure."

"We've already been out five days, so eleven remain before I hope to introduce you to the inhabitants of another world."

The inhabitants of another world! This idea took us all aback.

"Do you believe there are any such inhabitants?" asked Henry.

"I know there are," said Edmund. "Otherwise I wouldn't have taken the trouble to come."

"Of course," said Jack, stretching out his legs and pulling at his pipe. "Who'd go twenty-seven million miles if he didn't expect to see somebody?"

"Then that's what you put the arms aboard for?" I remarked.

"Yes, but I hope we shall not have to use them."

"Strikes me this is a sort of a pirate ship," said Jack. "But what kind of arms have you got?"

For answer Edmund threw open a locker, and showed us an array of automatic guns, pistols, and some cutlasses.

Getting Close to Venus

DEcidely piratical!" cried Jack. "But, see here, Edmund. With all this interatomic energy that you've got under control, why in the world didn't you construct something new—something that would just knock the Venustians silly, and blow their old planet up, if it became necessary? It seems to me that automatic arms, though pretty good at home, are rather small pumpkins for invading a foreign world with."

"I didn't prepare anything else," said Edmund. "In the first place, because I hadn't time; and, in the second place, because I didn't really anticipate any fighting. I hope that we can get along without that."

"You mean to try moral suasion, I suppose," drawled Jack. "Well, anyhow, I hope they'll be

glad to see us, and since it's Venus we're going to visit, I expect that the ladies will be perfect hours for beauty. I'm glad you made it Venus instead of Mars, Edmund, for from all I've heard about Mars, with its fourteen-foot giants, I don't think I should care to go there."

We all laughed at Jack's fancies, but there was something thrilling in the idea, too; for here we were (unless we were dreaming) actually on the way to Venus! I tried every way I could think of to test whether it was a dream or no, but do what I would I came always to the conclusion that I had never been more wideawake in my life. Both Jack and I were sufficiently romantic to find a great charm in the thought of visiting another world, but Henry was different. He always looked at the money in a thing.

"Edmund," he said, "I think you have made a fool of yourself. What good will it do you, or us, to go to Venus? Here you have got an invention that will revolutionize mechanics. You might, if you had exploited it as you ought, have made the greatest millionaire look like the smallest kind of an atom. But instead of developing the thing in a businesslike way, you rush off into space on harebrained adventure."

"That depends upon the point of view and the mental make-up," Edmund replied calmly. "To me Venus is infinitely more interesting than all the wealth that you could pile up between the north pole and the equator. Am I not the Columbus of space—and you my lieutenants?" he added smiling. "Besides, just wait until we return to the earth. I don't promise to give my attention to money-getting then, but I may revolutionize a good deal more than mechanics."

"Yes, if we ever do return," said Jack, a little lugubriously.

Poor Jack! None of us knew, then, what was in store.

The time ran on, and we watched the day hand on the calendar clock. Soon it had marked a week; then ten days; then a fortnight. We were getting pretty close, but up to this time we had not yet seen Venus. Edmund had seen it, he said, but to do so he had been obliged to alter the course, because the planet was almost in the eye of the sun, and the light of the latter, streaming into the peep-hole, blinded him.

A Mysterious Display of Flames

IN consequence of the change of course, he told us, we were now approaching Venus from the east—flanking her, in fact—and she appeared in the form of an enormous shining crescent. I shall never forget my first view of her.

We had got within half a million miles, and Edmund was very nervous about meteors again. He said they were probably thicker round Venus than around the earth, because the former is nearer to the sun, and everything crowds up as you approach the center of the solar system. Consequently he would only allow us each a brief peep at the planet, because he wanted to be all the time at the lookout. The peep that I got was sufficient.

That vast gleaming sickle, hanging in the black

sky, was the most tremendous thing I ever looked upon!

Soon afterward Edmund changed the course again. We had not come upon the expected meteors in any great numbers, and Edmund said he felt safe now in running into the planet's shadow, and making a landing on her night hemisphere.

You see, Venus, as Schiaparelli had found out, doesn't turn on her axis once every twenty-four hours like the earth, but keeps always the same face to the sun. The consequence is that she has perpetual day on that side, and perpetual night on the other. I asked why we didn't land on the daylight side, but Edmund said his plan was safer. We could easily go from one hemisphere to the other, he declared.

But it didn't turn out to be as easy as he thought.

"I hardly expect to find any inhabitants on the dark hemisphere," he said. "It must be fearfully cold there—too cold for life to exist, perhaps. But one can never tell. Anyhow, I am going to find out. We'll just stop for a look at things, and then the car will carry us round to the other side. We can thus approach the inhabitants, who, I am sure, exist on that side, from behind, as it were, and that will give us a chance to reconnoiter them a little, and plan our arrival safely."

"If Venus is rightly named," said Jack, "I'm forgetting where the inhabitants are as soon as possible."

When we swung round into the shadow of the planet we got her between the sun and us. Then she completely hid the sun, and appeared like an immense black circle, blacker than the sky itself. But all round this black circle appeared a most beautiful ring of light.

"That's her atmosphere," said Edmund, lighted up by the sun from behind. But, for the life of me, I can't tell what those great flames mean."

Descending Into the Cavern of Venus

HE referred to a vast circle of many-colored flames that blazed and flickered with all the hues of the rainbow at the inner edge of the ring of light. It was the most awful, and at the same time beautiful, sight that I ever gazed at.

"That's something altogether outside my calculations," Edmund averred. "I can't account for it at all."

"Perhaps they are already celebrating our arrival with fireworks," said Jack, always ready to take the humorous view of everything.

"That's not fire," Edmund responded. "What it is I cannot say. But we'll find out. I haven't come all this distance to be scared off."

Our approach was so rapid that the immense black circle grew, hour after hour, with portentous swiftness. Soon it was so large that we could no longer see its boundaries through the peep-hole.

"We're within a thousand miles," said Edmund finally. "We must be close to the upper limits of the atmosphere. The atmosphere of Venus is denser and more extensive than that of the earth,

and if we rush into it we shall be burnt up by the effects of friction. I'll have to slow down."

He slowed down a little more rapidly than was comfortable. It was jerk after jerk, as he dropped off the power, but at last we got down to the speed of an ordinary express-train. Being out of the sunshine now, we had to use the electric-lamp to illuminate the car.

At length we got so close that the surface of the planet became dimly visible. We were settling very slowly by this time, and as we drew gradually nearer we began to notice singular shafts of light, that seemed to issue from the ground beneath us, as if it had been covered with so many iron foundries.

"By Jove!" cried Edmund; "I believe there are inhabitants on this side after all. I certainly don't believe that those lights come from volcanoes. I'm going to make for the nearest one, and will soon know what they are."

Accordingly, he steered the car for one of the gleaming shafts. It grew brighter as we approached, and threw a faint illumination upon the ground around it. Everything seemed to be very flat and level, as if we were dropping down upon a prairie. But no features could be clearly made out in the gloom.

Edmund boldly approached within a hundred feet of the light and, with the slightest perceptible bump, we touched the soil of Venus.

"It's probably frightfully cold outside," said Edmund; "and we'll put on these things by way of precaution."

He dragged out of one of his innumerable receptacles a lot of thick fur garments and gloves, as if we were going among the Eskimos, and made us put them on, while he dressed himself in similar fashion. Then he handed to each of us a pair of big automatic pistols, telling us to put them in our side-pockets. These preparations having been made, he cautiously opened the door, after having, as he said, electrically anchored the car to the ground.

The air that rushed into the car as the door was opened almost hardened us into icicles. It was colder than ten thousand icebergs!

"It won't hurt you," Edmund exclaimed. "It can't be down to absolute zero, on account of the atmosphere. I've kept it so warm inside the car that you've become pot-boiled. You'll soon be used to this. Come on!"

And he led the way out.

After glancing round us for a moment we cautiously approached the shaft of light.

It issued from an irregular round hole.

As we drew near the edge we saw that there were rough steps at one side of the pit, leading downward.

In another instant we were frozen stiff. Not with cold, but with amazement. My heart for a moment stopped beating.

Standing on the steps, watching us, with eyes as big and luminous as moons, was a creature shaped like a man, but more savage-looking than a gorilla!

CHAPTER IV

The Caverns of Venus—An Inhabitant

FOR two or three minutes the creature continued to stare at us, motionless, and we to stare at him. It was so dramatic that it makes my nerves tingle now when I think of it.

His eyes alone were enough to scare a man out of his senses. As I have said, they looked like full moons, they were so big, so round, and so luminously yellow. It was the phosphorescent yellow, shot with green, that you sometimes see in the eyes of a cat or a wild beast. Its great hairy head was black, but its short stocky body was as white as that of a polar bear. Its arms were long, like an ape's, and it had a look of immense strength and activity.

Edmund was the first to recover from the surprise, and then he did a thing that seems absurd when I recall it.

"Well, hallo you!" he called out, in a voice that made us jump as if it had been a thunder-clap. In that heavy atmosphere the sounds struck the eardrums like trip-hammers.

The effect on the creature was electric. A film shot across his big eyes, he made a sudden movement, uttered a queer squeak that seemed ridiculous coming from an animal of such size, and, in an instant more, he had disappeared, stumbling and tumbling down the steps.

"Hurrah!" shouted Edmund. "We've conquered a hemisphere!"

In fact, the evident terror of the creature immediately heartened us all. Our fear vanished, and, following Edmund, we rushed for the hole, and began a hurried chase down the steps.

We noticed that the air was decidedly warmer round the mouth of the pit, and as we descended the temperature rose. After a while we pulled off our Arctic togs, and left them on a shelf of rock, but we didn't leave the automatic pistols. Then we proceeded downward. It was an awful hole for depth. The steps, rudely cut, wound round and round the sides like those in a cathedral tower, except that the shape of the pit was not regular. It looked like a natural formation. Perhaps, I thought, the throat of an extinct volcano; though, there being no mountain, that didn't seem probable either. But the steps were certainly of artificial origin.

The Awful Tenants of the Cave

WHEN we had descended several hundred feet we emerged suddenly into a broad cavern. The temperature had been rising all the time, and here it was as warm as in an ordinary room. The cavern was, I should say, about twenty yards broad and eight or ten feet in height, with a flat roof. Over in a corner I saw a hole down which the steps continued. There was not a living thing visible, but there was light coming from what looked like a heap of coal, burning with great brilliance, in the center of the floor.

A strange but not unpleasant odor filled the place, and as we paused to consult we all spoke of the curious exhilaration which we had experi-

enced, almost from the moment of setting foot on the planet. Edmund said it was due to the dense atmosphere, which undoubtedly was heavy with oxygen. It certainly had a good deal to do with our rising courage, and our insensibility to fatigue. Notwithstanding the precipitancy of our long descent, we did not draw an extra breath. As we looked about us, seeing no one, Edmund declared that it was necessary to go on.

"We can't give it up," he said. "We've got to find the inhabitants, and now that we have seen one of them, we know pretty well what to expect. Come along."

He led the way down the steps in the corner. They wound round just like the others, and again we descended a long distance, perhaps as much as three hundred feet. Then we reached a second cavern, larger and loftier than the first. And there we found them!

There never was such a sight! It made our blood run cold again, notwithstanding our initial triumph, which had been so cheaply won.

Ranged along the farther side of the cavern, visible by the light of another heap of bright coal, were twenty or thirty of those creatures, standing shoulder to shoulder, with their great eyes glaring like bull's-eye lanterns. But the most frightful of all were their motions.

The Venustians Terrified by One Pistol Shot

YOU have read how a huge cobra, rearing on his coils, sways his terrible head from side to side before striking. Well, all those black heads before us, with their lantern eyes, were swaying in unison, only the motion was circular. Three times by the right, and then three times by the left, those heads circled, in rhythmic cadence, while the luminous eyes made phosphorescent rings in the air, intersecting one another in consequence of the rapid movement.

It was such a spectacle as no man ever beheld in the wildest dream. It was baleful! It was the charm of the serpent paralyzing its terrified prey. We felt it in an instant, and our brains began to whirl. I found myself staggering in spite of all my efforts to stand firm, and a kind of paralysis ran through my limbs. Presently, all moving together and uttering a hissing, whistling sound, they began slowly to approach us, keeping in line, each shaggy leg lifted high at the same moment, like so many soldiers on parade, while the heads continued to swing, and the glowing eyes to cut linked circles in the air. But for Edmund we should have been lost. He spoke to us over his shoulder, in a whisper:

"Boys, take your pistols and kill as many as you can, but don't shoot unless they make a rush. I'll knock over the leader, in the center, and I think that'll be enough."

So saying, he raised his pistol; but, as for the rest of us, we could no more have stirred our arms than if we had been marble statues.

As the creatures approached another step, Edmund blazed away! The report was like an earthquake! It shocked us into our senses, and almost out of them again. The weight of the atmosphere,

and the confinement of the cavern, magnified and concentrated the sound until it was awful. The fellow in the center, that Edmund had aimed at, was hurled to the ground as if shot from a catapult. The others fell as flat as he, and all lay groveling, the big eyes filming and swaying wildly, but no longer in unison.

The charm was broken, and, as we saw our enemies prostrate, our courage and nerve returned.

"I thought so," said Edmund coolly. "It's the sound that they can't stand. I'm sorry I killed that fellow, for the report alone would have been sufficient. This atmosphere acts like a microphone. You have heard the voices of these creatures, which are hardly louder than whispers. Their ears are evidently not made for sounds of any magnitude. I shouldn't wonder if I had burst every ear-drum in the lot."

"After all," he continued, after a moment's thought, "it is perhaps as well that I took one life. Probably it would have had to come eventually, and now we have them thoroughly cowed. If they had ever reached us, they would have torn us asunder in a moment with those muscular arms."

The Food of the Natives and Their Cooking

AS he spoke, Edmund boldly approached the groveling row, and pushed with his foot the huge, fury body of the one he had shot. The bullet had gone through his head. At Edmund's approach the creatures sank even lower on the rocky floor, and those nearest to him turned up their moon eyes, with an expression of submissive terror and supplication that was grotesque, though unmistakable. He motioned us to approach, and, imitating him, we began to pat and soothe the shrinking bodies until, understanding that we would not harm them, they gradually acquired some confidence in us. In short, after a while a relation like that of masters with the most submissive slaves was established.

In the meantime the crowd in the cavern increased; others of the creatures, attracted perhaps by the noise, coming in continually through side passages. Those who had been present at our arrival explained the situation to the newcomers, as we could see, and it was evident that our prestige was thoroughly established.

As we became better acquainted with these creatures we found that they were not as savage as they looked. Their heads, and the larger part of their faces, were covered with black hair, but on their bodies was a white silky fur. Why the difference of color existed I could never imagine. The reason for the great size of their eyes appeared evident. It was the prevailing darkness of the side of the planet on which they dwelt. With those eyes they could see in the gloom like cats. They were surprisingly intelligent, too, in their way. Their construction of the hundreds of steps leading down into the caverns, and their employment of a kind of coal for heat and light, showed that. But this was not all.

We found that, in some of the caverns, which were connected with one another by winding passages, they cultivated their food, which consisted entirely of vegetables of various sorts, all unlike any that I had ever met with on the earth. Water dripped

from the roofs of these caverns, but there was no light except that derived from the burning coal, yet the vegetation, though almost colorless, seemed to thrive astonishingly.

A Necessary Killing

THEY had many ways of cooking their food, and although there yet remained a good supply of stores in the car, Edmund thought it advisable for us to accustom ourselves to the diet of the inhabitants. We found it decidedly agreeable, and without ill effects of any kind.

The only brute animals, of any size, that we could discover in the caverns were some dog-like creatures, about as large as terriers, but very furry.

The burial-ground of the community we discovered when they came to dispose of the fellow that Edmund had shot. It was a large, lone cavern, situated at a long distance from the one which we had first entered. We thought we saw indications of some kind of religious ceremony when they put their slain comrade in the ground; and then, for the first time, we recognized the women. We were astonished by the evidence of a monogamous relation among the sexes, which was furnished by the fact that one of these women manifested by her sorrow a special grief, which we thought could only be accounted for upon the supposition that she was the wife of the dead person.

She held two or three little ones by the hands, and we were fairly moved to tears by the spectacle, Edmund being particularly affected.

"I almost wish I had never come here," he said bitterly; "since the first thing I have done is to kill an inoffensive intelligent creature."

"Not so inoffensive, either," put in Jack. "If you hadn't killed him, where should we be now?"

"But it wasn't necessary," Edmund insisted. "The noise alone would have sufficed."

"Don't borrow trouble," said Jack sympathetically. "You did the best you knew, and Heaven knows what we should have done without you."

But I noticed that Edmund was afterwards very gentle with the poor creatures, who seemed to bear us no ill-will, feeling, probably, that we were superior beings, who could do as we liked.

I have spoken of them as a community, and I may say here that we afterward discovered that all this part of Venus was sprinkled over with similar communities, somewhat resembling separate tribes. Each tribe occupied a group of caverns by itself, and there seemed to be but little intercourse among them. They seldom went out of the caverns, except to perform a very remarkable ceremony, which led us into a danger that put streaks of silver on my head, where no gray hair was due for many years yet. But of that later.

The most surprising discovery that we made in the cavern was a big smithy! It was really nothing else. Edmund had foretold us that we should find something of that kind. He based his prophecy on the fact that there were rude tools and utensils of metal in the caverns. He examined the metal, and pronounced it iron.

"All the planets are largely composed of iron," he said. "These people here, primitive as they seem in many ways, have found out how to smelt and

make various articles of it. They must have a blacksmith shop, and I'm going to find it."

It wasn't long—perhaps two days' time after our arrival—when we came upon the place. It was in one of the side caverns, and we actually found several of the savage smiths at work, with furs fastened over their ears to ward off the sound. They were turning out long, sharp-pointed tools, the purpose of which Edmund divined in moment.

"They're to dig coal with," he said.

And he was right. The strata of rock were filled with seams of a very hard coal, and these people dug it out to keep their fires going. It was the best coal that I have ever seen, infinitely better even than anthracite.

"But where did they get their fire to begin with?" asked Jack.

"Perhaps by friction, like our savages on the earth," Edmund replied.

"Perhaps they got it down below," I added.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jack.

"I know what he means," interposed Edmund, "better than he does himself, perhaps. Venus, there is reason to believe, is not as old a planet as the earth. Consequently its crust is not as thick. It may be that the internal fires do not lie so deep. I shouldn't be surprised if that accounts, in part, for the comfortable temperature down here, when the surface above us is so terribly cold, owing to the absence of the sun."

Our discovery of the smithy seemed to have set Edmund to thinking. After musing a while, he said:

"This is a most fortunate thing for us. We'll have occasion to employ the skill of these fellows, and to teach them something new, for our own benefit."

"How's that?" I asked.

The Strange Sledge Trip Proposed

"IT'S this way: I want to take some of these fellows along when we start for the daylight ride of the planet. I can find my way well enough with the aid of the stars, but these creatures may be useful to us in other ways. But we can't take them in the car, which is full enough already. Luckily, the power of the car is practically unlimited, and it could draw a whole train, if necessary. Now, I'm going to carry them along in sleds, dragged after the car, and I'll make the sleds of iron, since there's no wood to be had. It's another lucky thing that this part of Venus is almost a dead level, a sort of rolling prairie, as you have observed, covered with a kind of icy shingle, which is just suited for runners. Trees can't grow here; and if there were ever any rivers, they became frozen solid ages ago."

"But why not make the fellows walk?" asked Jack. "They've got good legs."

"Walk!" said Edmund. "Why, man, we've got at least five thousand miles to go before we reach the edge of the sunlit hemisphere, and I don't propose to spend several months on the way. With the sleds drawn after the car, we can make the journey at the rate of a hundred miles an hour."

"All right," said Jack. "The sooner you start

the better, as far as I'm concerned. I want to find the good-looking people of Venus. These don't suit my taste."

Henry, after his manner, said nothing; but as I saw him looking about, I got the impression that he was calculating the millions that might be made out of these iron-mines on Venus. Edmund never reached a decision without starting immediately to put it into practise. He now began his preparations for the journey to the other side. But they were quickly interrupted in a most dramatic fashion.

While we were occupied in the smithy, as I call it, showing the native smiths how to fashion the runners and upper parts of the proposed sleds, we were interrupted by some one coming in and calling our assistants away from us. They all ran out, and we after them. On arriving in the principal cavern, we found a singular scene.

The Earth Seen from Venus

TWO natives, whom we did not recognize as having made their appearance before, were evidently in charge of some kind of ceremony. They wore tall, conical caps of polished metal, covered with curious hieroglyphics, and had staves of iron in their hands. They marshaled all the others, numbering several hundreds, into a long column, and then began a slow, solemn march up the steps. The two leaders produced a squeaking music by blowing into the ends of their staves. Women were mingled with men, and even the children were not excluded. We followed at the tail of the procession, our curiosity at the highest pitch.

At the rate we went it must have taken nearly an hour to mount the steps. As we emerged into the open air, the cold struck to our marrow. The natives, covered with fur, didn't seem to mind it, but we ran back to the shelf where he had left our Arctic outfits, and put them on. Then we ascended again and emerged into the night, finding the crowd assembled not far from the entrance to the cavern. The frosty sky was ablaze with stars, and directly overhead shone a huge brilliant planet of amazing beauty, and close beside it a smaller one. "The earth," said Edmund, pointing upward, "and the moon."

It was indeed our planet and her satellite. I can't describe the feeling that came over me at the sight. But in a moment Edmund interrupted my meditation.

A Ceremonious Procession of the Venustians

"LOOK at that!" he said.

L The natives had formed themselves in a great circle under the starlight, with the two leaders standing in the center. All the others dropped on their knees, and the leaders raised their long arms toward the sky and gazed up at the zenith, at the same time uttering a kind of chant in their queer, subdued voices.

"By Jove, they're worshiping the earth!" exclaimed Edmund.

Indeed, she looked worth worshiping! Never have I seen so amazingly splendid an object. She

was twenty times as brilliant as the brightest planet that any terrestrial astronomer ever beheld. And the moon, glowing beside her like a great attendant star, redoubled the beauty of the sight.

"It's just the time of the conjunction," said Edmund. "This is their religion. Those fellows are their priests. The earth is their goddess. I understand it all now. I wouldn't have missed this for a world."

Suddenly the two priests began to pirouette. As they whirled more and more rapidly, their huge glowing eyes made phosphorescent circles in the gloom, like those that had alarmed and fascinated us when we first met the creatures in the cavern. They gyrated round the ring of worshipers with astonishing speed, and all those creatures fell under the fascination and drooped to the ground, with eyes fixed in evident helplessness upon the two performers.

An Impending Sacrifice of One of the Travelers from the Earth

NOW, for the first time, I caught sight of a square object, that seemed to be a stone, rising a couple of feet above the ground, in the center of the circle.

At this instant the spinning priests, having drawn close to the ring of fascinated worshipers, made a dive, and each caught a native in his arms and ran with him toward the square object that I have described.

"It's a sacrificial stone!" cried Edmund. "They're going to kill them as an offering to the earth and the moon."

The truth flashed into my mind, and froze me with horror. But just as the second priest reached the altar, where the other had already pinned his victim with a stroke of the sharp point of his staff, his captive, suddenly recovering his senses and terrified by the awful fate that confronted him, uttered a cry, wrenched himself loose, and, running like the wind, leaped over the circle and disappeared in the darkness. The fugitive passed close to us, and Jack shouted, as he darted by:

"Good boy!"

The enraged priest was after him like lightning. As he came near us his awful eyes seemed to emit actual flames. But the runner had already vanished.

Without an instant's hesitation, the priest shot out his long arm and caught me by the throat. In another second I felt myself carried, in a bound, as if a tiger had seized me, over the drooping heads of the worshipers, and toward the horrible altar.

CHAPTER V

Off for the Sunlands

DREADFUL as the moment was, I didn't lose my senses. On the contrary, my mind was fearfully clear and active. There was not a horror that I missed!

The strength and agility of my captor were astounding. I could no more have struggled with him than with a lion.

'Only one thing flashed upon me to do. I yelled with all the strength of my lungs. But they had become accustomed to our voices now, and the mad-dened creature was so intent upon his fell purpose that a cannon-shot would not have diverted him from it.

He got me to the altar, where the preceding victim already lay with his heart torn out, and, pressing me against it with all his bestial force, raised his pointed staff to transfix me. With my dying eyes I saw the earth gleaming down upon me, and (will you believe it?) my heart gave a glad bound at the sight!

She was my mother planet, and the thought that she might help me in my extremity raced across my brain. But the dreadful spear had already begun to descend. I could see the sweeping muscles under the litho fur, and I pressed my eyes tight shut.'

Bang!

Something grazed my shoulder, and I felt the warm blood gush out. Then I knew no more.

A Recovery from a Swoon

IN the midst of a dream of boyhood scenes, a murmur of familiar voices awoke me. I opened my eyes, and couldn't make out where I was.

"I must still be dreaming," I said to myself, and closed my eyes once more.

Then I heard Edmund saying:

"He's coming out all right."

I opened my eyes again, but still the scene puzzled me. I saw Edmund's face, however; and behind him Jack and Henry, standing with anxious looks. But this was not my room! It seemed to be a cave, with faint firelight on the walls.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"Back in the cavern, and coming along all right," Edmund answered, smiling.

Back in the cavern! What could that mean? Then, suddenly, the whole thing flashed back into my mind.

"So he didn't sacrifice me?" I said, shivering at the thought.

"Not on your life!" Jack's hearty voice broke in. Edmund was too quick for that."

"But only by the fraction of a second," said Edmund, still smiling.

"What happened then?" I asked, my recollections coming back stronger every moment.

"A good long shot happened," said Jack. "The best I ever saw."

I looked at Edmund. He saw that I wanted the story, and could bear it; and, his countenance becoming serious, he began:

"When that fellow snatched you and leaped into the circle, I had my sur coat wrapped so closely around me, not anticipating any danger, that for quite ten seconds I was unable to get out my pistol.

"I tore the garment open just in time, for already he was pressing you against the accursed stone with his spear poised. I'm used to quick shooting, and I didn't waste any time finding my aim.

"Even as it was, the iron point had touched you when the bullet crashed through his head. The shock swerved the weapon a little, and you got only a scratch on the shoulder, which might have been

more serious but for the thickness of your Arctic coat.

The Dead Priests and a Life Saved

"THE fellow fell dead beside you, and under the circumstances I felt compelled to shoot the other one also; for they were both insane with the delirium of their bloody rites, and I knew that our lives would never be safe as long as they remained fit for mischief."

"I'm sorry to have had to start killing right and left like this, but I reckon that's the lot of all invaders, wherever they go. It's our second lesson, and I think it will prove final."

"When their priests were dead, the rest had no fight in them. In fact, they never intended to harm us; but nobody knows what those two chaps might have led them into. My conscience is easy about them, anyhow."

"How long have I been here?" I asked.

"Two days by the calendar clock," said Jack.

"Yes," Edmund assented; "two days. I never saw a man so knocked out by a little shock, for your wound wasn't much. I fixed that up in five minutes. You must have been scared to the very bottom of your soul—not that I blame you, however. But look at yourself."

He held a pocket-mirror before me, and then I saw that my hair was streaked with gray.

"But we haven't been idle in the mean time," Edmund went on. "I've got two sleds nearly completed, and tomorrow—earth time—I mean to set out."

My wound was very slight, and the effects of the shock had all passed off during my long spell of insensibility. In an hour or two I was aroused, busy with the others.

I found that Edmund had already picked out the natives that he meant to take with us. They were a dozen huge fellows, who, he had discovered, possessed more than average intelligence. Among them was one of the smiths, the best of the lot, and for convenience Edmund had given him a name, something resembling that by which his comrades called him—Juba.

Starting the Sled Trip

AMONG his other apparently infinite stores of useful things in the car Edmund had a roll of small, strong steel cable, and this now came admirably into play. The two sleds were pitched one behind another with a piece of the cable, and a line about a hundred feet long connected them with the car. The latter could thus rise to a considerable height without lifting the sleds from the ground.

The sleds were provisioned from the stores of the natives, and we took some of their food in the car also, not merely to eke out our own, but because we had come to like it.

The fellows selected to join our expedition made no objection. On the contrary, they seemed proud to accompany us, and were evidently envied by their comrades.

The scene at starting was a strange one. About five hundred natives, the entire population of the group of caverns belonging to their tribe, which were distributed over about a square mile, assembled

at the entrance to our cavern to see us off. As we started, the natives on the sleds, being unused to the motion, clung together like so many awkward white bears taking a ride in a circus.

Their friends stood about the ill-omened sacrificial-stone, waving their long arms, while their huge eyes goggled in the starlight.

Jack in a burst of enthusiasm, fired four or five shots from his pistol. As the reports crashed through the heavy air, you should have seen the crowd vanish down the hole! The sight made me wince when I thought that they must have gone down like a cataract, all heaped together.

But they were tough, and I trust that no heads were broken. The effect on our twelve fellows on the sleds came near being disastrous. I thought that they would leap off and run, and no doubt they would have done so but for the fact that Edmund put on so much speed that a new terror instantly took the place of the old one.

Instinct taught them not to jump, when the ground was spinning away under them at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Edmund brought Jack sharply to book for his thoughtlessness.

"Give me your pistol," he said, in his old masterful way, which nobody that I ever saw could stand against.

Jack was almost twice his size, but he handed over the pistol like a rebuked schoolboy.

"When you learn how to use it, I'll give it back to you," said Edmund, and that closed the incident.

The plan of the sleds worked like magic.

A Hundred Mile an Hour Sleigh Ride

AFTER their first fear had vanished, the natives began immensely to enjoy the new sensation. Edmund worked up the speed, as he had promised, to a hundred miles an hour, and even for us in the car it was a glorious spin.

But there was one danger that had to be guarded against—the mouths of the caverns.

As I have told you, the natives were divided into tribes, each tribe being in possession of a group of caverns. These caverns were undoubtedly of natural origin, but why they were not more uniformly distributed over the surface I cannot say.

Anyhow, the fact was that perhaps forty or fifty pits would be found, scattered over a mile or two of ground, and many of them connected by underground passages; and then there would be a long distance without any caverns. All seemed to be inhabited; and to that fact we owed, in a great measure, the safety of the sleds.

The shafts of light issuing from the caverns were so many beacons in the endless night, telling us where the underground settlements lay; and so we avoided running the sleds into the holes, although we had one or two narrow escapes as it was.

Twice Edmund insisted on stopping at a group of caverns to make the acquaintance of their inhabitants. On both occasions we descended into the caves, and found the creatures at home. Whether they would have received us so civilly if we had not taken Juba along I can't say.

Juba, the Venustian Intercessor

INVARIABLY he acted as intercessor and interpreter, and I guess our reputation suffered no belittlement from his accounts of our prowess. It was evident, Edmund said, that there were differences of dialect in the language of the various tribes, which puzzled Juba somewhat; but he also said that he was now convinced that there existed among these people an unexplained power of communicating thought which had no connection with the utterance of sounds.

It wasn't a sign-language like that of deaf mutes, either. The mystery was not solved until we got round on the daylight side of Venus, but it turned out to be one of the most incredible of all our discoveries in that strange world. You'll hear about it when I come to it.

We continued to guide our course by the stars—and they were certainly magnificent, with the earth for a very queen of gems set in the midst of them—until we had traveled some four thousand miles, all the time, of course, approaching the edge of the sunward hemisphere.

And now a new phenomenon struck us. For some time, along the horizon ahead, had stretched a faint streak, like the first light of dawn.

"Look," said Edmund, "there lie the sunlands of Venus. Although the sun never rises on this part of the planet, it will rise for us because we are approaching it."

There was nothing to surprise us in all this; but as we drew nearer, and the arc of dawn rose higher in the sky and glowed more softly beautiful, there appeared at its base those same many colored flames which had astonished us on our approach to the planet, after we had got into its shadow and begun to see its atmosphere as a great ring of light around it, the sun being behind. The reappearance of these flames startled us.

"They've got something to do with the sunrise!" Edmund declared; "but I can't make out what it is."

"Don't run us into a conflagration," said Jack. "We've had enough to do to stand the cold here, and to put up with the company of these fury beasts, but I object to being rushed next into a land of salamanders. They probably are fire-eaters on the other side. If you can show us some temperate or not too torrid land, where the people are as beautiful and attractive as they ought to be on a world called Venus, I'm with you with all my heart."

"That's not fire," replied Edmund.

"Why not inquire of Juba?" I asked.

"A very good idea. I'll try," and Edmund stopped the car. Juba, as he had already been taught to do whenever we stopped, immediately jumped off his sled and came running to us. Edmund took his match-box from his pocket, struck a match, and, while attracting Juba's attention, pointed alternately to match flame and the fiery objects on the horizon.

Juba understood at once, and vigorously shook his head, while his big, luminous eyes almost seemed to speak, if we could have understood their meaning. Phosphorescent waves appeared to chase one

another in their depths, and Edmund asserted that it certainly was a language, expressed without sounds.

If it was a language, I positively think that Edmund had begun to understand it, for after a few minutes, during which he and Juba gesticulated and motioned and stared in each other's faces, Edmund turned to us and said:

"I ought to have foreseen this, and I am ashamed of myself because I didn't. Those seeming flames on the horizon are due to—what do you think? Mountains of crystal!"

"Mountains of crystal!" we all exclaimed.

The Mountains of Crystal the Cause of the "Flames"

"YES, just that. It's all plain enough when you think about it. Venus, being a world half day and half night, is necessarily as hot on one side as it is cold on the other. All the clouds and most of the moisture are on the day side of the planet, where the sunbeams act.

"The hot air, charged with moisture, rises over the middle of the sunward hemisphere and flows off above, on all sides, toward the night hemisphere, while from the latter cold air flows in underneath to take its place. Along the junction between the two hemispheres the clouds and moisture are condensed by the increasing cold, and fall in ceaseless storms of snow.

"This snow, descending uninterruptedly for ages, has piled up in vast mountainous masses. The moisture cannot pass very far into the night hemisphere without being condensed, and so it is all arrested within a great ring, or band, completely encircling the planet and marking the division between perpetual day and perpetual night.

"What look like gigantic flames to us are the sunbeams striking those mountains of solidified snow and ice from behind and breaking into prismatic fire."

The thing seemed simple enough after Edmund had explained it, but the effects were splendid and awful beyond description.

"I foresee now considerable trouble for us," Edmund continued. "There's been a warning of that, too, if I had but heeded it. I've noticed for some time that a wind, gradually getting stronger, has been following us, sometimes dying away and then coming up again. It is likely that this wind gets to be a terrible tempest in the neighborhood of those ice mountains.

"It is the back suction, caused—as I have already told you—by the rising of the heated air in the sunny side of the planet. It may play the deuce with us when we get into the midst of it."

"But did you learn all this from Juba?" I asked.

"Oh, no! Of course not. I only managed to make out from him that his people knew of the existence of these icy barriers. But the explanation flashed upon me as soon as I got hold of the main fact. Now, we've got to be a little cautious in our approach."

Danger of An Irresistible Wind

WE slowed down accordingly, and as soon as we did so we began to notice the wind that Edmund had spoken of. It came in great gusts

from behind, gradually increasing in frequency and in fury. Soon it was strong enough to drive the sleds without any pulling from the car, and sometimes they were forced close under us, and even ahead of us, the natives hanging on in wild alarm.

Edmund managed to govern the motion of the car for a while, holding it back against the storm; but, as he confessed to us, this was a thing he had made no provision for, and eventually we became almost as helpless as a ship in a typhoon.

"I could easily cut loose from these fellows and run right out of this," said Edmund, "but I'm not going to do it. I've taken them into my service, and I'm bound to look out for them. If there was room for them in the car it would be all right."

"By Jove! I've got it," he added, a moment later. "I'll fetch up the sleds, attach them under the car like the basket of a balloon, and carry them all! There's plenty of power. It's only room that's wanting."

It was no sooner said than done with Edmund.

By this time we were getting into the ice. Great hummocks of it surrounded us, although there was nothing yet resembling the mountains that Edmund had spoken of, and we dropped the car down in the lee of an icy hill, where the force of the wind was broken. The sky overhead was still free from clouds, but ahead we could see them whirling and tumbling in mighty masses of vapor.

Lashing the two sleds together, we attached them about ten feet below the car with wire ropes. Then the natives were assembled, and Edmund made them fasten themselves securely. When everything was ready, we four entered the car and the power was turned on.

"We'll rise straight up," said Edmund, "until we are out of the wind, and then we'll sail over the mountains and come down as nice as you please on the other side."

It was a beautiful program, and we had complete confidence in our leader; but it didn't work as we expected. Even his genius had met its match this time.

The Wind at Last Strikes Them

NO sooner had we risen out of the protection of the ice hummock than the wind caught us. It was a blast of such power and ferocity as we had not yet encountered. In an instant the car was spinning like a top; and there away we rushed before the tempest, the sleds being banged against the car, like tassels whipping in a storm. It was a wonder of wonders that the creatures on them were not flung off, or killed, by the frequent impacts.

But, fortunately, Edmund had seen that they were securely fastened, and, as you know already, they could stand knocks like so many bears. In the course of twenty minutes we must have traveled twice as many miles, perfectly helpless to arrest our mad rush or to divert our course, pitched hither and thither, and sprawling on the floor half the time. The noise was awful, and nobody ever tried to speak.

The shutters were open, and suddenly I saw through one of the windows a sight that I thought was surely my last.

The car seemed to be sweeping through a dense cloud of boiling vapors, when they split asunder before my eyes; and there, almost right against us, was a glittering precipice of pure ice, gleaming wickedly with blue flashes, and we were rushing at it as if we had been shot from a cannon!

There was a terrific shock, which I thought for a moment must have crushed the car like an egg-shell, and then down we fell—down and down!

CHAPTER VI

Lost in the Crystal Mountains

If we had seen the danger earlier, and had not been so tumbled topsy-turvy by the pitching of the car in the wind, I suppose that Edmund would have prevented the collision, just as he had steered us away from some of the meteors, by setting up an "atomic reaction," serving for a push. But there was no chance for that. The blow against the precipice was not, however, as severe as it had seemed to me, and the car was not smashed.

But the fall was terrible.

There was only one thing which saved us from destruction. At the base of the great cliff of solid ice, against which the wind had hurled the car, an immense deposit of snow had collected, and into this we fell. We were all tumbled in a heap, the car and the sleds being inextricably entangled with the wire ropes.

Fortunately, however, the stout windows were not broken; and after we had struggled to our feet, as the car lay on its side, Edmund managed to open the door. He made us put on our furs, but even with them we found the cold almost intolerable.

But the natives paid no attention to it. Not one of them was seriously hurt; and they were still attached to the sled, so firmly had they been bound under Edmund's direction before we started from the hummock. We unloosed them, and then began to examine the situation.

Above us towered the icy precipice, disappearing in whirling clouds high overhead, and the wind drove square against it with the roar of Niagara. The air was filled with snow and ice-dust, and at times we could not see objects ten feet away. Our poor furry companions huddled together as soon as we got them upon their feet, and were of no use to themselves or to us.

Danger of Destruction Among the Ice Mountains

"**W**ELL, we've got to get out of this mighty quick," said Edmund. "Come, hustle now, and we'll repair the ship."

We got to work, Juba alone aiding us, and soon had the sleds out of the tangle and again properly attached to the car. Then we entered the latter, and Edmund fumbled a while with his machinery.

In the course of ten or fifteen minutes, he said that it was damaged, but would still work, and that we'd start as soon as we could replace the natives on the sleds. We got them together with a good deal of trouble, for they were frightened out of their wits; and would have run away, had they known where to go. But they had sense enough to understand that their safety depended entirely

AMAZING STORIES

upon us. When they were once more safely attached, we entered the car and prepared to ascend.

"You notice," said Edmund, "that this wind is variable, and there's our chance."

We hadn't noticed it, but he had, and that was sufficient.

"When the blasts weaken," he continued, "the air springs back from the face of the precipice, and then whirls round to the left. I've no doubt that there's a passage there, through which the wind finds its way back behind this icy mountain, and if we can get there we shall probably find some sort of shelter."

"Then, I hope, it'll be comparatively an easy thing to make our way into a calmer region of the atmosphere. I'm going to take advantage of the first lull."

It worked out just as he had predicted. As the wind surged back, after a particularly vicious rush against the mighty blue cliff, we cut loose and sailed up into it, and away we went. We rushed past the glittering wall so swiftly that it made our heads swim. In two or three minutes we rounded a corner, and then found ourselves in a kind of atmospheric eddy, where the car simply spun round and round, with the two united sleds hanging below it.

"Now for it!" said Edmund, and touched a knob.

One Crisis Is Passed Without Accident

INSTANTLY we rose rapidly. We must have shot up a couple of thousand feet, when the wind caught us again, coming apparently over the top of the icy barrier that we had flanked. It swept us off with terrific speed. Suddenly the air cleared all about.

The spectacle that opened around and below was—well, I wish I could describe it! But a hundred languages rolled into one couldn't do it.

We were in the midst of the crystal mountains! They towered around us on every side and stretched away in ranges of shining pinnacles. And such shapes! Such colors! Such flashing and blazing of gigantic rainbows and prisms!

There were mountains that looked to my amazed eyesight as lofty and massive as Mont Blanc, composed all of crystalline ice, refracting and reflecting the sunbeams with iridescent splendor! For now we could begin to see the orb of the sun itself, poised on the edge of the jagged, gem-glittering horizon. The jeweled summit split its beams into a million bright halos.

There was one mighty peak, still ahead of us, but toward which we were rushed sidewise with terrific speed, that will haunt my dreams forever. It towered high above our level, and was simply one awful coruscating *Alp of light*, darting out on every side blinding rays of a thousand splendid hues, as if a whole worldful of emeralds, rubies, sapphires, and diamonds had been heaped together in one stupendous pile and set on fire by the sun!

We were speechless, even Edmund. But presently he spoke, very calmly; but what he said instantly changed our amazement to terror.

"Boys," he said, "there's something serious the matter with the apparatus. I can't make the car rise higher. I can no longer cause it to react

against an obstacle. We are at the mercy of the wind. If it carries us against that glittering devil, no power under heaven can help us!"

If my hair had not whitened before, it certainly would have whitened now.

When we were swept against the first icy precipice, the danger had come upon us suddenly, unexpectedly, out of a concealing cloud. But now we had to bear the fearful strain of expectation, to see ourselves hurried to destruction with our eyes wide open to the terrible truth.

I thought that even Edmund's iron face paled a little. On we rushed, still borne sidewise, so that the spectacle was straight before us in all its awfulness, as, with fascinated eyes, we stared through the window. We were almost upon the mountain-peak, when Edmund shouted with a glad voice:

"We're safe! Look!" he continued. "See how those particles of ice, swept from the face by the tempest, leap hitherward, and then whirl round the peak. We may touch it; but the air, having a free vent on each side, will carry us one way or the other before a serious shock occurs."

Castaways in a Valley of Ice

HE had hardly finished speaking when the crisis arrived. We did just touch the front of a cliff; but it was narrow and sloping, and the wind, howling past it, carried us in an instant round the obstruction.

"Scared ourselves for nothing," said Edmund. "We were really as safe as a boat in a rapid. The velocity of the current sheered us off."

But there was a worse danger, which he hadn't yet had time to think about. We began to think of it, however, when, after the scintillant peak was left behind, we saw Edmund again working away at his machinery, while at the same time the car commenced to sink.

"What's the matter now?" I asked. "We seem to be going down."

"So we are," Edmund replied, "and I'm afraid we'll not go up again right away. The power is failing all the while. It will be pretty hard on us to have it stop in this frightful place, but it looks as though that were our fate."

Lost and helpless in these mountains of ice! The thought was too terrible to be entertained. For the first time since this adventure began, I heard connected words from Henry's lips. Their emphasis was terrible.

"Edmund Stonewall," he said hoarsely, "if you are the cause of my death with your infernal invention, may you be condemned to—"

But he never finished the sentence. His face turned as white as a sheet, and he sank upon the floor.

"Poor fellow!" said Edmund. "He's fainted."

In a few minutes Jack and I had Henry in his senses again, but as weak as a child, and lying on one of the cushioned benches. In the mean time the car had descended upon the snow in a deep valley, where we were protected from the wind.

In the profound depression where we now found ourselves a kind of twilight prevailed. We got out of the car, unloosed our companions from the sleds, and then began to look around.

All about us towered the crystal mountains, their bases—where they were not buried in snow and broken ice—reflecting deep hues of purple and ultramarine; while their upper parts, where the sunlight touched them, sparkled with amazing brilliancy. Henry was now able to join us, but not a word was said concerning his outbreak.

Was there ever such a situation as ours?

Twenty-six Millions of Miles from Home

CAST away, in a place wild and wonderful beyond imagination, millions of miles from all human aid or sympathy; millions of miles, even, from the very world that had witnessed our birth!

I could, in bitterness of spirit, have laughed at the mere suggestion that there was any hope for us. And yet, at that very moment, not only was there hope, but there was even the certainty of deliverance. It lay in the brain of the wonderful man who had brought us thither.

I have told you that it was twilight in the valley where we were. But when, as frequently occurred, tempests of snow burst over the mountains above us and filled the air, the twilight was turned to deepest night; and then we had to illumine the electric lamps in the car.

The natives, being used to darkness, needed no artificial illumination. In fact, we found that as soon as the sunlight reached us their great eyes were almost blinded; and they suffered cruelly from an infliction so utterly beyond all their experience.

Edmund never lost his self-command. He tried to cheer us up.

"I'm going to make some hot coffee," he said, "and then I'll sit down and think it out. But first I must see to our fellows there, for we may have to stay here a while; and even with their furry skins, they'll suffer from this kind of weather."

Saving the Natives on the Sleds

UNDER his directions, we took a lot of extra furs from the car and, stretching them upon the upright stakes attached to the corners of the sleds, we made a kind of tent, under which the natives huddled for protection.

There being no wind to speak of here, this was not so difficult as it might seem. The fellows were very glad of the shelter that we had given them, for some of them were already beginning to shiver. No sooner were they housed than they fell to eating.

We then entered the car and turned on the electric range, and ten minutes later we were enjoying our coffee. When we had finished we got out our pipes and smoked, as if there had been no crystal mountains tottering over us and no howling tempest tearing through the cloud-filled sky a thousand feet or so above our heads.

We talked of our adventure, and of home—home twenty-six million miles away! In fact, it might have been nearer thirty millions by this time, for Edmund had told us that Venus, having passed conjunction, was beginning to recede from the earth.

But Edmund did not join in our conversation now. He sat apart, thinking; and we respected his isolation, knowing that our only chance of escape lay in him. At last, without saying a word, he went

outside and remained a long time. Then he came back smiling.

"I've found the solution," he said. "We'll get out all right, but we shall have to wait a while."

"What is it?" we asked in concert. "What have you found?"

The Libration of Venus to Rescue the Visitants

"**A**LBERT," he said, turning to me, "you ought to know what libration means. Well, it's libration that is going to save us. As Venus travels around the sun, she turns just once on her axis in making one circuit. The consequence, as you already know, is that she has one side where the sun never rises, while the other side always faces the sun.

"But since her orbit is not a perfect circle, she travels a little faster at certain times, and a little slower at others, while her slow rotation on her axis never varies. The result is that along the border between the day and night hemispheres there is a narrow strip where the sun rises and sets once in each of her years, which are about two hundred and twenty-five of our days in length.

"On this strip the sun shines continuously for about sixteen weeks, gradually rising during eight of those weeks, and gradually sinking for eight weeks more. Then, during the following sixteen weeks, the sun is entirely absent from the strip.

"Now, we are just in that strip, and we may thank our stars for it. By good luck, after we were swept past that blazing peak of ice which nearly shipwrecked us, the wind carried us on so far before the power gave out that we descended on the sunward side of the crest of the icy range.

"The sun is at present just beginning to rise on this part of the planet, and it will continue to rise for several weeks. The result will be that a great melting of ice and snow will take place all around us here; and a river will be formed in this valley, flowing off toward the sunward hemisphere, exactly where we want to go.

"I'm going to take advantage of the torrent and float down with it. It's our only chance, for we couldn't possibly clamber over all this hummocky ice and drag the car with us."

"Why not leave the car behind, then?" asked Henry.

Edmund looked at him and smiled.

"Do you want to stay on Venus all your life?" he asked. "I can repair the mechanism, if I can find certain substances, which I am sure exist on this planet as well as on the earth.

"But there is no use of looking for them in this icy waste. No, we can never abandon the car, we must take it with us, and the only way to take it is with the aid of the river of ice and snow-water which will soon be created by the rising sun."

"But how will you manage to float?" I asked.

"The car, being air-tight, will float like a buoy."

"And how about the natives?"

"Ah! I'll have to think about that. But we'll save them, too, if possible."

Of course Edmund was right; he always was. But I'll cut short the story of our stay in that awful valley.

Every twenty-four hours, by the calendar clock,

we saw that the sun had risen higher; and as it rose, the sky cleared, and its beams, falling uninterrupted, became hotter and hotter. Soon we had no longer any use for furs, or for the electric heat in the car.

At the same time the melting began. It was a new danger for us, yet we watched it joyously, since it offered our only chance of escape.

We were just in the bottom of the valley, near its head. It wound away before us, turning out of sight beyond a vast hill of ice. Streams began to trickle down the heights behind us, and, uniting, they formed a rivulet at our feet, flowing over smooth ice with great velocity.

A Deluge from the Melting Ice

EDMUND'S plan for saving the natives was now put into operation.

"I'll take Juba into the car," he said. "There's just room for him. For the others, we'll fasten the sleds one on each side of the car, which is buoyant enough to float them, and they'll have to take their chances outside."

We made all these arrangements, while the rivulet gradually swelled into a torrent. Before it had become too broad and deep we managed to place the car, with the sleds like outrider, across the center of its course. Then we took our places and waited.

Higher and higher rose the water, while from the slopes behind and around us avalanches of ice descended, and great cataracts began to leap and pour. It was a mercy that we were so situated that the avalanches did not reach us, although we received some pretty hard knocks from ice floes borne away in the current.

At last the stream became deep enough to float us.

Shall I ever forget that moment?

There came a sudden wave of water, forced on by a great slide of ice; we were lifted upon its crest, and away we went! The car was more buoyant than I had believed possible. The sleds, fastened on each side, served to give it a certain stability, and it did not sink as deep as the bottom of the windows. The latter, though formed of glass of great thickness, might have been broken by the tossing ice if they had not been divided into many small panes, separated by bars of steel, which projected a few inches on the outside.

"I made that arrangement for meteoric fragments," said Edmund, "but I never thought of ice when I did it."

The Dangers Lessen as the Ice Melts

THE increasing force of the current soon sent us spinning down the valley. We swept around the nearest ice peak on the left, and as we passed under its projecting buttresses a fearful roar above informed us that an avalanche was let loose.

We could not withdraw our eyes from the window on that side of the car, and presently immense masses of ice came crashing into the water, throwing it over us in floods and half drowning the poor wretches on the sleds. Still, they clung on, fastened together, and we could do nothing to help them.

The uproar continued, and the ice came down

faster and faster with a deluge of water. The car pitched and rolled, until we could hardly keep our feet, hanging on to every support within reach.

Poor Juba was a picture of abject terror. He hung, moaning, to a bench, his huge eyes aglow with fright. Suddenly the car seemed to be lifted from the water. Then it fell back again and was submerged, so that we were buried in night. We rose again to the surface, and Edmund, glancing from the window, shouted:

"They're gone! Heaven have pity on them!"

In spite of their fastenings, the water and the ice had swept every living soul from the sled on the left! We rushed to the other window.

It was the same story there—the sled on that side was empty too! I saw a furry body tossed in the torrent along side, and then it disappeared in the raging water. At the same time, Edmund exclaimed:

"Heaven forgive me for bringing these poor creatures here, to lose them!"

CHAPTER VII

The Children of the Sun

BUT the situation was too exciting to permit us to think long of the poor creatures whose deaths we had undoubtedly caused. There seemed less than an even chance of our getting through ourselves.

As we went tossing and whirling on, the water rose still higher, and the blocks of ice assailed us on all sides. First, the sled on the left was torn loose; then the other disappeared. The car was left to make its own way.

But the loss of the sleds was a good thing, now that their occupants were gone. It eased off the weight and the car rose much higher in the water; and gave room more readily when pressed by ice blocks.

It rolled more than before, to be sure; but still it was well ballasted, and did not turn turtle. It took one fearful plunge, however, over a perpendicular fall of, I should say, twenty or thirty feet in height. But the water was very deep; and we came up again after the plunge like a cork, and whirled off down the rapids.

The Belt of Storms

AT last the stream became so broad that the danger from the floating ice was to an extent relieved, and we began to look about us more coolly. As in all cases of long-continued peril, we were becoming hardened by so many escapes and growing more and more confident.

We had got out of the ice mountains by this time, and the elevations about us were of no great height. But we could see the glittering peaks towering far behind, and it was a most appalling sight to watch many of the nearer hills suddenly sink, collapse, and disappear, just as—if you have ever watched the operations of the cook in the kitchen when a boy—you have seen pinnacles of soft sugar melt down in water.

Edmund said that all of the icy hills and mounds through which we were passing, no doubt, owed their existence to pressure from behind, where the

sun never rose, and where the ice was piled into actual mountains. These foot-hills were, in fact, enormous glaciers, thrust out toward the sunward hemisphere.

After a long time the river that bore us broadened out into a veritable lake. The surface around became comparatively level, and was all covered with the water. The sun rose higher and higher as we approached it, and the heat increased.

Vast fields of ice floated in the great lake, whose water was not muddy, as it would have been if it had passed over soil, but of crystal purity and wonderfully blue in the deep places. And now we began to notice the wind again.

It came fitfully, first from one direction, and then from another. At times it rose to the fury of a tempest and lifted the water into huge waves. But the car rode them beautifully.

"Therein lies our greatest danger," said Edmund. "The current still sets in the same direction, and I foresee that we shall be carried into a region where the contending winds will play perfect havoc."

The Airships of Venus

IT is the region where the hot air from the sunward side begins to descend, and the cold air from the other side meets it. It is a belt of storms, and it may form a barrier more tremendous than the crystal mountains themselves. We shall have all we can do to escape being cast away when we approach a shore—for shore of some kind there must be."

It came out nearly as he had anticipated, except that the current gradually died away, and we found ourselves driven about by the wind. This continually increased in force, and at last the sky became choked with dense clouds, which swept down upon the face of the waters, and were whirled into black tornadoes by the circling blasts.

Frequently the car was deluged by waterspouts; and at such times, when in the center of the gyrating spouts, it would actually be lifted clear into the air. An ordinary vessel would have been unable to live five minutes in that hell of waters and of winds. But the car went through it like a giant bubble.

I do not know how long all this lasted. It might have been forty-eight hours. The thing became worse and worse. Sometimes rain mingled with hail descended in vast sheets. Half of the time one window or the other was submerged, and when we were able to look out we could see nothing but the awful clouds whipping the surface of the water.

But at length, and with amazing quickness, there came a change. The clouds broke away, brilliant sunlight streamed into the car, and, as we rocked first to one side and then to the other, we caught glimpses of a marvelous dome high overhead.

It was not a blue vault, such as we see on the earth. It was of an indescribably soft grayish color, and under it floated here and there delicate curtains of cloud, like the mackerel skies that precede a storm. They were tinted like sheets of mother-of-pearl; but, although the light was bright, no sunshine appeared.

The lake had now expanded into an apparently boundless sea, whose surface had quieted down, for

the winds no longer blew with their former violence. Presently Jack, who was standing alone at one of the windows, called to us.

We went to his side of the car, and he pointed to something that glittered high up in the air.

"What's that?" he asked.

"What are those, rather?" I demanded, for I had caught sight of a dozen of the glittering objects ranged in an almost straight row, at an elevation perhaps of two thousand feet, and several miles away from us.

A New Race of Venustians

NOBODY answered for a long time, while we continued to gaze in astonishment. Even Juba noticed the things with his moon eyes, which did not suffer here quite as much as they had done in the sunshine. At last Edmund said:

"Those are air-ships."

"Air-ships!"

"Yes, nothing less. An exploring expedition, I shouldn't wonder. I anticipated something of that kind. You know already how dense the atmosphere of Venus is. It follows that balloons and air-ships can float much more easily here than over the earth. I was prepared to find the inhabitants of Venus skilled in aerial navigation, and I'm not disappointed."

"Then you think that there are people in those things up there?"

"Of course; and I reckon that they've seen us, and are going to investigate us."

It was a startling thought, and I confess that I had to screw up my courage. To be sure, we had come here expecting to find inhabitants; but I, at least, hadn't looked to meet them so soon, and certainly I was not expecting first to find them in the sky.

I felt like the hunter who goes after a grizzly, and suddenly perceives his enemy staring down from a rock just over his head.

Edmund was evidently correct in surmising that they had seen us. Some kind of signal flashed among the air-ships, and they altered their course. Still keeping in line, they began to advance in our direction, at the same time gradually descending.

As they drew nearer we could make out some of their details.

The Effect of Loud Sound in the Dense Atmosphere of the Planet

THEY were long and narrow, and bore considerable resemblance to airplanes which I had seen at home. But they were much more complete. They were evidently driven by screws, and they seemed to be steered with great ease and certainty. Their approach was rapid.

When we first saw them they were probably three miles away, but in the course of some minutes they had drawn so near that we could see their decks crowded with what certainly looked like human beings. I felt a great relief in noticing that they bore no resemblance to the creatures we had encountered on the night side of the planet.

But then came the disturbing thought—shall we be any safer because they are more like men? With increase of intelligence comes increase of the power, and often of the disposition, to do evil. However,

we had to face our fate, whatever it might be. It wasn't likely that they would begin by making an end of us. Their curiosity would first have to be satisfied.

They showed no apprehension. Why should they? All that they saw as yet was an odd-looking affair floating on the water. They might take it for some strange marine animal, but they could never imagine that it contained intelligent beings whose eyes were watching them.

At length they came to rest within a hundred yards of the car. Then one of the air-ships settled gracefully down upon the water, where it rose and fell with the swell as gently as a swan.

With some appearance of caution it began to approach us. What should we do?

Edmund answered the question in a practical manner without consulting the rest of us. He threw open a window, and stepped out upon a steel ledge running just beneath it. You should have seen the astonishment of our inquisitors when they caught sight of him.

Instantly they stopped the slow movement of their craft and gathered at its bow, staring at Edmund and making all sorts of strange gestures. Edmund repeated the same maneuvers that he had employed at the entrance of the cavern where we first landed.

"Hallo, you!" he called out.

A Beautiful Woman in Command

HIS voice sounded like a tremendous crack, and a momentary panic seized them. They were evidently as unused to loud voices as were the creatures on the other side of the planet. But they were not so easily cowed. Feeling themselves at a safe distance from the strange monster, they held their ground.

We were not prepared for their next move. If they had given no evidence of the abject fright that had overcome the creatures of the cavern when their ears were thus assailed, they had at least shown that they were greatly startled and disturbed; and we ascribed their comparative coolness to the fact that they were in a ship which they knew could take flight into the air at a moment's notice.

But we misjudged them; or, rather, one of them. To our surprise, after the momentary effect of Edmund's shout had passed, they began again to approach us.

Reading Our Souls

THEN we saw that this maneuver was due to the commands of a person standing near the bow, and our amazement may be imagined when we recognized—beyond all possibility of doubt—that this person was a woman!

They were now within fifteen yards of us, and every detail of the faces and figures was visible. There were, perhaps, thirty persons on the airship, which continued floating easily on the water; and of these, half a dozen were certainly women.

They stood in a group in front of the men, and one of them, as I have said, by her commands directed the movements of the vessel. Jack, whose irrepressible optimism had not been permanently

affected by our recent terrible experiences, exclaimed, as we all crowded at the window behind Edmund:

"Amazons, upon my word! The women are in command here. I should rather have expected to see Mars leading the Venuses."

"Not Amazons in appearance," I replied. "Did you ever see any creatures more beautiful than those women?"

And, indeed, as the way of the approaching craft was stopped, and it drifted very slowly nearer, our eyes were fairly dazzled by the spectacle which those women presented!

Their forms and faces were distinctly human in type, but with a suggestion of something almost superhuman. I particularly noticed their leader.

She was bewildering. She seemed a Madonna just descending from the sky. And yet she was rather an Aphrodite than a Madonna.

Her complexion was light, with a flame upon the cheeks; her hair a chestnut blond. Her eyes, of a pure sapphire-blue, seemed to radiate a light of their own. I had never seen, had never dreamed, of such eyes. They were more than eyes; they were truly what the poets had imagined—"windows of the soul."

Such expression as they had! I verily believe that they spoke. I could feel a strange influence proceeding from them.

Her dress and that of her companions was something that I cannot describe, farther than to say that it suggested the attire of a Greek statue. It was not the dress that terrestrial women would wear at the present time, except perhaps in some remote Pacific island; but it revealed and enhanced the beauty of the wearer in a manner that would have driven an artist wild with admiration.

In the presence of this vision we had no eyes for the men in the background; and yet, as a glance showed, they were no less remarkable for physical attractions.

They were of about the average human stature, and very perfectly formed, with attire as classically simple as that of their beautiful companions. We were all so lost in amazement and admiration that even Edmund seemed to have been struck dumb and motionless, not knowing what to do.

The craft drifted within four or five yards of the car, and then the woman who commanded it slowly lifted her right hand, revealing a glittering bracelet of gems upon her white wrist; and with a smile of indescribable winningness made a motion which said, as plainly as words could have done:

"Strangers, you are welcome."

CHAPTER VIII

An Adventure in the Air

I MUST hurry on to what followed that first meeting on the sea. The events were so wonderful, they so transcended all human experience, that to relate them in detail would require volumes; and among them there are things impossible to describe, because so entirely without terrestrial analogy.

It was now that we first became completely aware

of the existence of that incredible power of communicating thought without the intervention of spoken language to which I have before referred.

It might, perhaps, be described as a kind of telepathy. I have already told you that at the first glance into the eyes of the Aphrodite who commanded the air-craft, I felt that in some strange manner those eyes could speak. And so they could.

They all had a language of the eyes—or, at least, a language that seemed to radiate from them. I thought of the speculations of a German enthusiast that I had read, concerning "odic force."

And yet they spoke with their lips, also, in low, soft tones, exceedingly agreeable to the ear. But this language of sounds was only a subsidiary method of communication. The other was the tongue of nature, and we felt that our minds could comprehend it, although at first only in a dim, uncertain way. We did not know exactly how to reply, but they understood us.

A Language and No Language

THEY seemed to read our souls. We had only to think what we would say, and with amazing readiness they interpreted many of our thoughts. It was mind-reading carried to perfection.

So no long time had elapsed before an astonishing degree of mutual comprehension was established. Juba comprehended even quicker than we did, which was but natural, and yet these blond, clean-skinned people were as much astonished at his appearance as at ours.

It was evident that the inhabitants of the two sides of this strange world had never before encountered one another. Still, they seemed to understand instinctively that Juba, for all his extraordinary features and his baboon-like form, was more closely allied to them than to us.

Edmund, who so greatly excelled the rest of us in intellectual force, made rapid progress in the unparalleled intercourse which now began. To our surprise, it was not long before he told us the name of the beautiful commander, or one of them, for he said she seemed to have several names—one or more of which, he thought, might be titles.

"They call her Ala," he said; "at least, that is as near as I can pronounce it, and we may as well accept that for her name."

As soon as it became evident that we had nothing to fear from these people—at least, for the present—Jack's enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"Jove! Edmund," he said, "but I thank you for bringing me here. This is Venus, without a doubt."

Later, I shall tell you more about that wonderful language, which was at the same time no language and all language—for it developed into things infinitely more incredible than any that I have yet related. But enough for the present.

You can now comprehend how it was that, landing in another world, we were able so soon to establish an understanding, and even an intimacy, with its inhabitants. Believe me, on the earth nobody has yet begun to dream what mind means.

Edmund soon made Ala understand that we wished to journey into the lands lying beyond the shores of the sea. He told us afterward that his

conjecture had been right, and that the air-ships were really on an exploring expedition along the borders of the world of light, because the inhabitants on that side of Venus had a great curiosity to know what lay beyond the storms and clouds in the mysterious empire of night.

Evidently, it was the violent tempests which prevailed near the crystal mountains that prevented the passage of their aerial craft. The mountains themselves they had never seen. But they felt that they had made a discovery of the first magnitude in finding us, for they took us to be inhabitants of the other side of the planet, although they were puzzled by the manifest difference between Juba and the rest.

A Magnificent Reception

IMAY say here that, although the light was more diffused and softer under the cloudlike dome than in the sunshine that prevails on the earth, Juba's huge eyes suffered so much that we contrived for him a mask to protect them. Later on he became better able to bear the light.

Feeling that their expedition had been crowned with unlooked-for success, our new friends were ready to gratify Edmund's desire by hurrying back to their home. Only one difficulty was encountered at the start. Edmund refused absolutely to abandon the car.

It was, of course, indispensable to us, and he was sure that he could repair the apparatus, once in possession of the materials that he required. Finally it was arranged that the car should be attached to one of the airships and towed after it as we had towed the sleds.

But Ala insisted that we should become her guests on her "yacht," as Jack called it, and we gladly consented.

We saw no danger, and apprehended none immediately. Nevertheless, we kept our automatic pistols in our pockets, and each also armed himself with an automatic repeating-rifle. Our hosts showed no special curiosity about these things, the nature of which they did not understand.

The airships were extremely ingenious. Edmund examined the one we were on from stem to stern, and I have no doubt that when he was through he understood it quite as well as its builders did. It was lucky that he did.

"If they had my secret," he said to us, "they would be incomparable. They are a great people."

"All the more pity that you brought nothing better than automatic arms," said Jack.

"I don't believe that they have anything as good in that line," Edmund replied. "From what I can make out, they are not much given to fighting."

We made rapid progress, and after twenty-four hours came in sight of land.

The coast was not high, but far beyond it we could see ranges of mountains; and apparently rising from the foot-hills of these mountains there were visible curious objects, the nature of which we could not make out from so great a distance.

They resembled immense floating cobwebs as much as anything that I can liken them to. Edmund tried to find out from Ala what it was that

(Continued on page 474).

A Columbus of Space

By GARRETT P. SERVISS

(Continued)

we saw, but beyond the fact that the objects were aerial he could learn nothing definite.

A Language of Colors of the Spectrum

AS we approached the coast we saw other airships heading toward us from various directions. We guessed at once that some kind of a greeting was in preparation for the returning explorers, but we could never have imagined the magnificence which the reception would assume. It was not long before our eyes were opened.

When we were, perhaps, ten miles off the coast, a vast flock of airships seemed to rise like birds from the land. In a little while they became innumerable, and it is impossible to depict the beauty of the spectacle which they presented.

The aerial vessels of our little fleet were all of one type, and, while they were excellent travelers, they were quite unpretending in their build and ornamentation. But those that were approaching showed a hundred different shapes and sizes. Chinese kites could not for an instant be compared with some of them in grotesqueness.

Many soared in vast circles at a great height, sweeping around and over us like eagles. Others flanked us on either side, and timed their progress with ours. Still others, probably a hundred in number, advanced to meet us in a great semicircle, where each kept its place with the precision of marching soldiers.

Suddenly, at a signal apparently, the air was filled with fluttering colors. To this day I have never been able to understand how that effect was produced. The colors were not on or in the airships only, but in the atmosphere all about. They were exquisite beyond all description.

It was as if the air had suddenly turned to crystal, with a thousand rainbows playing through it, their arches constantly shifting and interchanging. Presently from the craft that carried us answering shafts of color were shot out. Then I began to notice that there was a remarkable rhythm in the swift changes.

I do not know how to describe the impression better than by saying that it was as if a piano or organ should send forth from its keys harmonic vibrations consisting not of concordant sounds, but of even more delicately related waves of color. The permutations and combinations of the chromatic scale was marvelous. The shades of color seemed infinite in their variety, and the effect was magical. It thrilled us with awe and wonder.

A Threatened Collision Averted by Killing a Venustian Air Pilot

"THAT is a language," cried Edmund. "They are conversing in this way. They have the whole gamut of the spectrum of light at their command, and every varying shade speaks to them as

musical notes do to us; only the meaning conveyed to their minds is as definite as that of spoken words."

"But that cannot be possible!" I objected.

"It is perfectly possible," he replied. "It simply shows how far they exceed us in the delicacy of their nervous organization."

Soon we were all convinced that Edmund was right, and that we were looking upon a display of aerial telegraphy more wonderful than that of Marconi.

After a while the fluttering colors ceased to play. The communication was evidently ended for the time being. Most of the airships now turned and circled toward the land, escorting us.

But half a dozen continued to approach, and in a few minutes one of them, which had got very near, and which was moving at great speed, suddenly turned directly upon us. I expected to see it come to rest, but it kept bearing down with undiminished velocity.

"By Heavens," said Jack, "that fellow is going to run us down!"

There was no doubt of it. On came the ponderous vessel, its prow aimed straight for us, and a long projecting beam threatening to rake our little vessel like the tongue of a runaway fire-engine. There was a momentary excitement among our people.

Surrounded by a Fleet of Airplanes

ALA gave an order, and a quick attempt was made to alter our course. But it was too late. Ala had advanced near the bow, and the projecting beam seemed about to strike her.

We turned pale with excitement, and my heart quailed.

A tall, handsome fellow stood near the prow of the approaching craft, and seemed to be making terrible efforts to manage some machinery.

"Blank the fool!" said Edmund. "Will he never get out of the way?"

An instant more and a cracking report broke upon the air. Edmund had fired his automatic rifle.

The effect was amazing. The prow of the approaching airship swerved instantly to one side, the threatening beam grazed the shrinking form of Ala, and she narrowly escaped being thrown overboard. But the danger was over in a flash, and the craft that had seemed certain to run us down shot harmlessly past our quarter.

For a few minutes none of us could speak. We could hardly think, so imminent had been the peril and so instantaneous the deliverance from it. At last I found voice.

"Edmund," I said, "how in Heaven's name did you do it?"

He was as pale as the rest of us, but his self-command was perfect. To my astonishment, there was a tone of deep regret in his voice as he replied:

"Have I come here only to kill? Look, I have slain another innocent creature!"

It was true, for the fellow I have spoken of had dropped at the shot at the very instant when his craft swerved from its course.

"I had to do it," Edmund continued, mastering his emotion. "He would not get out of the way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Cannot you understand—" He began with a little impatience, and then added: "But, of course, you know nothing about it. I knew, from my examination of the machinery of this craft, that the only way to prevent a collision was to burst a large safety-valve which was directly behind that fellow.

"That would cause the airship to lose way and swerve from its course. He ought to have managed it himself, but he was too stupid or too excited. There was nothing for me to do but to send a shot through him into the machinery. Heaven knows I had to do it, or she would have been killed, and all of us would probably have gone to the bottom."

So intense had been the excitement and fear among our companions on account of the impending collision, that the report of Edmund's shot did not produce the effect that it would otherwise have had.

But as it echoed up from the sea and reverberated in the sky, the other airships hurried in great alarm toward us, and soon we were the center of a fluttering crowd, which filled the atmosphere like a multitude of butterflies scared up from a roadside puddle.

Then the prismatic language broke forth again, and the air for a while was like a crazy-quilt whipping in the wind.

When everything had quieted again there came a great surprise for us. It was in some respects the most disheartening episode that had yet occurred.

Edmund, as you will have understood from what I have just related, had unquestionably saved Als, and probably all the rest, from instant destruction. In doing so he had killed a man—for these people can only be spoken of as men and women, generally

superior in physical beauty to those of the earth. But we thought that it should have been evident to everybody that his act was imposed by the necessity of the situation.

One of the Terrestrial Visitants is Made Prisoner

YEAT, instead of thanking him, they made him a prisoner on the spot!

The thing was done so quickly, and so unexpectedly, that there was no chance to interfere. And before we knew it, Jack, Henry, and I were sprawling on the floor of the airship, each borne down by half a dozen stout fellows, any one of whom would have been a match for us in single combat.

Jack tried to draw his pistol, the rifle having fallen in the sudden onslaught, but it was knocked from his hand. Before Henry and I could attempt to resist, Edmund called out to us:

"Don't try to shoot! That's not the way to get out of this. Depend on me."

"A pretty pickle you've got us into with your wonderful people who are 'not given to fighting'!" growled Jack.

"Keep cool," Edmund replied; he was perfectly cool himself, although almost choked by those who held him.

"I tell you that we'll get out of this all right. But conceal your pistols."

The rifles they took, but I thanked Heaven that they didn't know what to do with them. I observed Edmund smile, in his quiet way, when he added a moment later, addressing Jack:

"What's the good of changing your tune so quick? A little while ago you were thanking me for bringing you here. You'll have occasion to thank me again."

"I doubt it," grumbled Jack.

Henry, after his manner, said nothing, but his thoughts were on his face, and I whispered to him:

"For pity's sake, remember how these people read us. Don't look as if you were scared out of your wits! Brace up and trust to Edmund. He's brought us out of tighter fixes than this."

(To be continued in the September issue)

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Address: EXPERIMENTER PUBLISHING CO., 53 Park Place, New York City

A COLUMBUS of SPACE

~ By Garrett P. Serviss ~

Author of "The Moon Metal", "The Second Deluge", etc.



The creature was crushing the plane, bending its sides like pasteboard with that mighty trunk. For my part, I was paralyzed by the awful spectacle, but Edmund's sharp command brought me to my senses.

What Went Before

THE hero of the story, Edmund Stonewall, has discovered how to utilize atomic energy. He constructs a car that can traverse interplanetary space, actuated by this energy, and with two friends starts on a trip to the planet Venus, not disclosing to them his intention at first. He reaches a rather desolate part of the planet, where daylight never appears, sees the almost ape-like inhabitants, cave dwellers, who wish to sacrifice one of them to the gods, and they rescue the proposed victim only by killing the High Priest. They get in among the valleys in a mountain of ice, on the edge of the dark face of the planet, tak-

ing with them some of the cave dwellers on sleds. The car with sleds fastened alongside and all but one of the cave-dwellers upon them, is carried now along a sort of glacial stream, but soon sleds and the unfortunate occupants disappear, and our travellers are left with only one of the ape-like cave dwellers, Juba, as company. Now they reach the warm regions of Venus, where there is perpetual day, and there find a highly developed race who communicate with each other by a species of telepathy, and our travelers are enchanted by the beautiful appearance of the beings, who are superior in every way to terrestrial mankind.

A COLUMBUS OF SPACE

By GARRETT P. SERVISS

Part II

CHAPTER IX.

An Astonishing Reception at the Capital



DIDN'T feel myself quite all the confidence that I tried to express to Henry, for this scrape differed essentially from any that we had been in yet; but still I relied a good deal upon Edmund's resources.

It presently became evident that the man he had killed was a personage of importance—an admiral, perhaps. Anyway, it was clear that they meant to make us pay for what we had done.

There was one thing, however, which gave me a little comfort, and awoke the hope that we might yet escape. This was the behavior of Ala. She seemed to be not much more than a girl in age, but she was treated on all hands with the greatest respect. Her word was law.

That was evident the moment they began to come aboard our ship. It was not only our crew, if I may so call them, that obeyed her, but everybody. And it was delightful to see the dignity with which she bore herself.

She was a very princess in manner and carriage, and yet there was something peculiarly gentle in all her ways which made her irresistibly winning.

I could not think that, as far as I might depend upon her, she would approve the exaction of a very severe punishment for Edmund's unintentional offense, and I was the more convinced of this when I reflected upon what I had noticed in their bearing toward one another during the trip. Considering where we were, no doubt it may seem ridiculous to speak of such a thing as love!

But there is love at first sight on the earth—why not there, a world inhabited by such beings as we had encountered, who certainly were human in their characteristics, and almost more than human in their beauty?

While, on the other hand, Edmund was as many a representative of the race of Adam as I have ever looked upon, and he had the light of genius in his eyes.

Anyway, take it how you will, I believed that a mutual attraction had been felt by these two inhabitants of different worlds, and I began to think that this very thing had been in Edmund's mind when he forbade us to resist.

As soon as our captors found that we offered no resistance, they partially released their grasp, but we were all bound, so that we could not escape.

Having passed over the land, we rose a little higher, for there was a range of hills ahead of us, and then, flanked on both sides by other air-ships, we held our course toward the distant mountains. Whether the suggestion came from Edmund or not, I cannot say, but our car, which had been towed over the sea, was now lifted upon one of the larger air-ships, and it continued to ac-

company us. I felt very glad to see that.

All our hopes of ultimate escape centered upon our own original car!

Floating Aerial Palaces

IN the course of several hours of very rapid traveling we began to draw near the mountains, and now those singular cobweb-like objects which we had caught sight of in the far distance became very plain to view. Although prisoners, we were not

IN this installment, Professor Serviss introduces us into the daylight as well as the civilized hemisphere of the planet Venus. We become acquainted with the high culture of the inhabitants of the planet, with their thought reading ability, with their prismatic, silent, but colorful language, as well as the grotesque dangers of the twilight zone, where prehistoric beasts as high as houses are still roaming in their virgin forests.

Particular attention is called to Professor Serviss's accurate astronomical and scientific knowledge, and if the planet Venus is indeed enveloped in a dense atmosphere, as now believed by most scientists, you may be certain that conditions exactly as described by the author prevail.

AMAZING STORIES

kept separate, and no attempt was made to prevent our conversing.

As the strange objects grew more distinct, Jack, who had recovered his equanimity, was, as usual, the first to speak.

"By Jove! Edmund," he said, "here's a new chance for your genius for explaining mysteries. What are those things?"

"I'm surprised that you haven't guessed," was the reply. "It's perfectly plain what they are."

"Not airships?"

"Certainly not. They're palaces."

"Palaces?"

"Why, of course."

"Castles in Spain, I reckon," said Jack disdainfully.

"No, simply castles in the air. Why shouldn't they float such things here? This atmosphere is exactly suited for them. You see how easily these airplanes ride. It is a region of atmospheric calm.

"Only the most gentle breezes are stirring. I doubt if there is ever a high wind here. It's exactly what we should expect of these people. They are almost as much inhabitants of the air as of the land. And could any idea be more beautiful than that?"

Nobody replied. We were lost in admiration, both of the idea and of the scene. It seemed "probable" that Edmund was right again.

As we continued to approach we became convinced that he was, for the details of the airy architecture began to be visible.

First, we saw an immense number of towers looming up, with stage above stage, like the huge steel buildings of New York before they received their outer coverings, but infinitely lighter and more delicate; truly fairy constructions, glittering with thousands of brilliant points.

Then, below these, apparently anchoring the floating structures to the earth, appeared long cables which, from our distance resembled gossamer threads bespangled with dew. Still nearer, and at last we believed that we could see people in the buoyant towers.

A few minutes later there was no doubt about it, for the colors broke forth, and that marvelous interchange of chromatic signals, which had so astounded and delighted us on nearing the coast, was resumed.

"It is my belief," said Edmund, "that, notwithstanding the buoyancy of the air, they are compelled to use power to keep those aerial edifices afloat. You will see, when we are nearer, that every stage is furnished with revolving screws, which help to hold them in position. Without that I am sure they would not stay up, particularly when there are people upon them."

And so it turned out. In a short time we were near enough to see the screws working, in a maze of motion, like the wings of a multitude of insects. The resemblance to insects' wings was increased by their gauzy structure and they flashed and glittered as if enameled. The vast towers swayed slightly to and fro with a sinuous motion.

Between us and the swimming palaces was another range of hills, and as we approached near enough to look over into the valley behind we uttered a cry of surprise.

A vast city made its appearance, a magnified counterpart of the aerial city about it. I have seen Constantinople in the morning sun from across the Bosphorus; I have beheld Damascus, with its spires; I have admired the domes and minarets of Cairo, shining in the gold of an Egyptian sunset—but all of these spectacles, combined with all that the imagination has pictured of such scenes, and multiplied a thousandfold in beauty and complexity, would give but a faint idea of what was spread before us.

"It is surely the capital," said Edmund. "There can be nothing greater than this."

The Capital of the Kingdom

IT was indeed the capital, for in the midst of it of it rose an edifice of unparalleled splendor, which could only be the palace of a mighty king.

Above this magnificent building, which gleamed with metallic reflections, although it was as light and airy in construction as frostwork, rose the loftiest of the aerial towers, a hundred stories in height.

While the other craft fell back, we kept on until we reached the principal stage of this tower. From below ran a crowd of smaller airships, which ran up and down the sides of the tower, stopping at various stages, discharging their living cargoes.

"Elevators," said Edmund sententiously.

Glancing around, we saw that the same scenes were occurring at all the neighboring towers. They were filling up with people, and the continual rising and descending of the little craft that bore them, the holiday aspect of the gay colors everywhere displayed, and the general brilliancy of the spectacle, produced a deep impression upon us. But the most astonishing effect still awaited us.

Just as our vessel reached the landing stage the enormous tower, from foot to apex, broke out with all the hues of the prism, like an enchanted rose-tree, covered with millions of brilliant flowers at the touch of a wand. The effect was overwhelming.

The air became tremulous with rippling colors, whose vibrant waves, with quick succession of concordant tints, gave to the eye an exquisite pleasure, akin to that which the ear receives from a carillon of bells. Our companions, and the people crowded on the tower, seemed transplanted with ecstatic delight.

"The music of the spectrum!" cried Edmund. "The diapason of color! This is their national hymn, written on a prismatic instead of a sonometric staff. And, mark me, this has a significance beyond your conjectures. Such a reception can only mean that our conductress is a person of the most exalted rank."

We were not long in doubt as to that. Our craft was made fast, and Ala was the first to step upon the landing stage and pass into the tower. She was received on every hand with the most respectful salutations. A tall young man, as handsome as Apollo, met her with a profound genuflection, and conducted her beyond our sight.

Then we were led ashore.

The curiosity that we excited was immense. They pressed and thronged about us, men, women, and children, speaking rapidly in their low tones, and exchanging thoughts by glances of the eye.

We could feel what they said about us. We knew that they regarded us as inhabitants of the mysterious, unvisited side of their world, and the contrast in appearance between Juba and us amazed them, as it had amazed their countrymen who first beheld us.

But they were not afforded much opportunity to study us, for we were hustled through the throng, without catching sight of Ala again, and presently we embarked with our captors on one of the "elevators," and made a thrillingly rapid descent. Arrived at the bottom we were led through some long stone-walled passages into a veritable dungeon.

And there they left us!

I wondered if this had been done by Ala's orders. The reflection shook my confidence in my theory.

"I wasn't prepared for this," said Edmund, speaking through the darkness, for we could not see one another; "but I couldn't have been better provided if I had foreseen the emergency."

Almost as he spoke, a brilliant light illuminated the place. He had turned on a pocket electric lamp. We looked about, and found that we were in a square chamber, about fifteen feet on a side, with walls of heavy, closely dressed and matched stones.

"They make these things solid enough down here," said Jack, "however light and airy they may be above."

In Prison

HENRY sank upon the floor, the picture of dejection and despair. I expected from him another outbreak like that in the ice-mountains, but he spoke not a word. His heart was too full for utterance. I pitied him so much that it served to reanimate my spirits a little.

"Come now," I said, "don't take it that way, man. Have confidence in Edmund. He has never yet been beaten."

"He's got his hands full this time, I reckon," Jack broke in pessimistically. "What do you think, Edmund? Can your interatomic energy bore a hole through these walls?"

"If I had anything to work with, you'd see," Edmund replied. "But there's no occasion to worry. We'll come out all right."

It was his universal remark when in difficulties, and somehow it always enheartened us.

Juba, more accustomed than we were to such situations, seemed to be the least disturbed member of the party. He rolled his huge eyes around, and then lay down on the floor and seemed at once to fall asleep.

"That's a good idea," said Edmund, smiling. "It's a long time since we've had a nap. Let's all try a little sleep, I may dream of some way out of this."

It was a fact that we were exhausted for want of sleep, and, in spite of our situation, we fell into deep slumber, as peaceful as if we had been in our beds at home. Edmund had turned out the lamp, and the silence and the darkness were equally profound.

Planning An Escape

I HAVE no idea how long I slept. I only know that I awoke startled by the light, and found them all on their feet, except Juba, who sat on the

floor blinking his big eyes. Edmund, seeing me rise, said at once:

"I've found a way out. I'm half disposed not to try it, because I have an idea that we'll come out all right anyhow. But when you are in a hole, and Providence throws you a rope, perhaps it's best to test it."

"What have you found out?"

"Something extremely simple. This is no prison-cell, but a part of what we should call the engine-rooms. Probably it's a mere store-room. They have put us here for convenience, trusting more to the darkness than to the lock, for the corridors outside are as black as Erebus and as crooked as a labyrinth."

"How do you know?"

"Because while you slept I investigated. The lock is nothing. The merest tyro could pick it. Fortunately they never guessed I had a lamp in my pocket."

"Around a corner, a little way from our door, there is another door, opening into a passage that leads past a power-house. That passage gives access to a sort of garage of airplanes, and when I stole into it, five minutes ago, there was not a soul in sight.

"We'll simply slip out there, and if I can't run away with one of their machines I'm no engineer."

I thought of Ala again, and Edmund's expression of confidence in our ultimate safety made me hesitate to take this new risk, but Jack and Henry were eager to get out, and we decided to try.

Motioning Juba to follow, we stole out, and stepping noiselessly by the power-house, where we saw several men at work, we found ourselves among the airplanes. Edmund had no difficulty in opening a door, which led out into a deserted courtyard.

I never admired Edmund more than when I saw the masterly way in which he manipulated one of the airplanes.

One would have said that it was his own invention, so well did he handle it.

It rested on runners, and all we had to do was to push it out of the door, while Edmund turned on the power. We jumped aboard, and in a moment were circling in the air.

At this instant we were seen! There was a flashing of signals, and two airplanes shot into sight above us.

"Now for a chase!" said Edmund.

We darted upward in a long curve.

The others turned and swooped upon us!

CHAPTER X.

A Parley Ten Miles High

WITH a quick turn, Edmund dodged the nearest pursuer, and we rose so rapidly that in two seconds we were skirting the great tower. Then others saw us, and forty airships joined in the chase. Jack's spirits rose with the excitement.

"Sorry to run away from these Venuses," he said. "but no dungeons for me, if you please."

"We're not away yet," Edmund responded over his shoulder.

Indeed, we were not!

The air-ships swarmed out on every side, like hornets from their nests. The air seemed full of them. I gave up all hope of escape, but Edmund was like a racer who hears the thunder of rival hoofs behind him. He put on more and more speed, until we had to hang to anything handy to prevent being blown off by the wind we made or whirled overboard on sharp turns.

Crash! We had run straight into a huge airplane that persisted in getting in our way. She dipped and rolled like a floating log. I saw the men on her deck tumble over one another as we shot by, but fortunately none fell off. I say fortunately, because surely it would not have bettered our case to kill any more of them just now.

Busy as he was, dodging and turning, Edmund did not cease occasionally speaking to us.

"There's just one chance to beat them," he said, "and only one; and I'm going to try it as quick as I can get out of this press."

I had no notion of what he meant, but a few minutes later I divined his intention. All the while, I observed, he was working higher and higher. The spectacle of that magnificent city, spreading every moment wider as we rose, and changing shapes and colors like a view in a kaleidoscope, would have held me enthralled with admiration—if I had had time to fix my attention upon it.

Still we shot upward, making the necessary circles as small as possible; and so recklessly had Edmund turned on the speed that at last it really began to look as if we should escape. Two-thirds of our pursuers were far below our level. But the others comprehended our plan and rose with us, some endeavoring to get ahead and cross our bows.

While I saw that Edmund's idea was to hold a skyward course, I was far from guessing the particular reason he had for doing so. Finally Jack spoke up.

"See here, Edmund," he said, "if you keep on going up instead of running off one way or another, they'll corner you in the middle of the sky. Don't you see how they have circled out on all sides, so as to surround us? Then, when we get as high as we can go, they will simply close in all round, and we'll be in a trap."

"Oh, no, we won't," said Edmund.

"I don't see why."

"Because they can't go as high as we can."

"I'd like to know why they can't. I guess they understand these things as well as you do?"

"Can a fish live out of water?" asked Edmund, laughing.

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, it's plain enough. These people are used to an atmosphere two or three times as dense as that which we have on the earth. It doesn't trouble our breathing much, having plenty of oxygen; but we can go where they would gasp for breath, because we can stand the rare air at a great height."

"My only doubt is about the flying ability of the airplane; but luckily this is a light car, and being under way, I think she'll run as high as we need to go, and stay there. You'll see them dropping off pretty soon."

A Strange Flight

AND they did drop off with great rapidity. Their own strategy, which Jack had called attention to, was simply a playing into our hands. They really thought to catch us in the middle of a gradually contracting circle, when, to their evident amazement, we rose into a region of the atmosphere where they knew that they could not live. Edmund fairly roared with laughter when he saw the success of his ruse.

But there was one thing that he had forgotten, and it struck to our hearts when we became aware of it. Poor Juba! He could endure this rare air no better than our pursuers. Already, unnoticed in the excitement, he had fallen upon the deck, where he lay gasping like a newly landed sturgeon. At last he ceased to struggle.

"Good Heavens!" cried Jack, "the poor fellow is dying."

"We must save him," said Edmund.

"But how? You wouldn't go back down there?"

"If we drop down near the limit, that stops the others," said Edmund; "he'll revive, and then we can dodge up and down enough to keep out of danger both ways."

No sooner said than done, and we began to descend. I reflected that here was the only mistake that Edmund had made during the whole trip; I mean the mistake of bringing along the natives from the caverns.

It was their presence that had prevented us from sailing triumphantly over the crystal mountains, at an elevation where there would have been no danger; it was because of them that we had wrecked the car; and now it was the presence of Juba that prevented us from keeping in a safe place. This wrought upon my mind so that finally I spoke about it to Edmund. Instantly Henry chimed in:

"Better let him die than lose our own lives."

"Stop!" said Edmund sternly. "A thousand times I have cursed myself for my error. I thought that those fellows would be of use. Instead, they were an encumbrance. But it was not their fault that they came. It is I that am responsible for their fate, and I shall never forgive myself; neither shall I ever abandon the last one that is left. I'd give up my own life rather."

That ended the discussion. We continued to drop, until, with much chafing of his hairy hands and body, and the aid of a little stimulant poured into his mouth from a pocket flask, we brought poor Juba round.

In the meantime the crowd of air-ships watching us from below began to close in their circle, evidently under the belief that we had been compelled to descend on account of the rarity of the atmosphere, and that at last they would have us sure. It was impossible not to admire their preparations for catching the expected fish.

Aerial Tactics on the Large Scale

THERE was such a multitude of the craft that they were able to form themselves into the semblance of a huge bag-net, the edge carried as high as they could go, while the sides and bottom were composed of airships packed as close almost as meshes. This great "net" was a mile across.

Edmund laughed again as he looked down into it.

"No, no, *messieurs*," he shouted, "we're no gudeons. You'll have to do better than that."

"See here, Edmund," cried Jack suddenly, "why don't you make off and leave them? By keeping just out of their reach, as you have said, we can easily escape?"

"And leave our own car!" was the reply.

"Jove!" said Jack, "I never thought of that. But, see here, in that case, what did you run away for at all?"

"Because," said Edmund quietly, "I thought it better to parley than to lie in prison."

"Parley? How are you going to parley?"

"That remains to be seen, but I guess we'll manage it."

We were now, as I estimated, about ten miles high. When we were highest, the great cloud dome that I have described was but a little above our heads, and we might have gone up into it and been lost from sight.

Our pursuers circled about to keep their positions a quarter of a mile or so below us. They were evidently parleying on their side, for waves of color flowed all about them, and the spectacle was so brilliant that we almost forgot our situation while watching it.

"I suppose you'll play them a prismatic symphony?" said Henry mockingly.

"Perhaps. Who knows?" replied Edmund coolly. "I've no doubt that the materials are aboardship."

A minute later he added:

"If I'd been here a month, I'd do it sure. But I haven't had time to study that subject yet. We must manage otherwise."

While we had been talking Edmund had not relaxed his vigilance, and two or three times he baffled a sudden dart of the enemy by circling desirably high above their heads, each time returning to a lower level as soon as Jube began to gasp.

At last we noticed a movement among the crowd below which betokened something important. In a moment we saw what it was. A gorgeous airplane, by far the handsomest that we had seen, had arrived in the midst of the flotilla. The others made way for it, and it came on directly towards us, as high as it could get. Immediately Edmund dropped down as if to meet it.

"I thought she'd come," I heard him mutter.

My heart jumped at the words, and in an instant my theory had possession of me again. I was sure that he had referred to Ala, and once more the conviction grew very strong within me that there was at least the beginning of an understanding between her and Edmund.

I felt glad; and, even in our apparently desperate situation, that feeling was not merely on account of the promise of escape. It partook of the sentiment which every human being experiences when he sees two young people's hearts opening to each other.

"Love will pull us through, if nothing else can," I said to myself. But I gave no hint to Jack or Henry, who would probably have laughed at me.

Ala on Her Flying Barge

IT was a very Cleopatra's barge that approached us, and Edmund didn't stop until we could see the eyes of the others. Then both air-ships, as by common consent, came to rest, simply soaring in parallel circles to maintain their buoyancy.

Ala stood forward on the deck, with her female attendants about her.

Exactly how they managed it I do not know; but I have already told you of the strange power of mind-reading, or telepathy, or whatever it was, that these people possessed, and that Edmund had made some little progress in this mysterious method of thought transference. He and Ala looked at each other, and I could see signs of pleasure in her face.

For half an hour or more we hung there, slowly circling, but without change of distance; and all the time those two continued their silent converse, occasionally emphasized by gestures, which even we could understand. Finally it was plain that a conclusion had been reached. There was a flashing of colors between Ala's airplane and the others, and all began to descend, we along with them.

After a while Edmund turned to us and said: "Well, boys, it's coming out all right; and isn't she a queen worthy of Venus?"

"Is she really a queen?" asked Jack.
"You'll see," Edmund replied, in his old manner, smiling a little. "But let me tell you the rest."

Then he went on to tell us that the trouble had all come, as we had suspected, out of his having killed a person of very great importance. But we had never guessed how extremely important that person was from our own point of view.

He was a prince of Venus!

"My luck is almost as bad as that of Oedipus," said Edmund. "But, prince or not, he acted like a blanked idiot; and, as you know, I had to kill him."

"Of course, you understand that there is a certain amount of guesswork in all this. I have had to reason from analogy, putting this and that together. My 'conversation' with Ala was not exactly as free as a *tête-à-tête* at home. But the fact that she could read *my* thoughts with comparative ease helped us along, because it was more important that she should understand our side of the story than that I should be able to understand hers."

"I may be mistaken in the prince idea, but I think not. Anyway, the fellow was of that degree of importance that Ala did not dare to interfere with their bringing us to book about it. As I told you before, I had confidence that, once I could make clear my motives, we should come out all right. But when the chance of escape from the dungeon presented itself, this idea of getting beyond their reach in the high air, and holding a parley, flashed into my mind, and I determined to try it."

"It ought to have been plain to them why you shot that chap," said Jack.

"It was plain to Ala," Edmund replied, "and I know that she intended to use the fact for our exculpation. But I was afraid of the others. Remember that we are nothing to them, except objects of curiosity. If it had been a common fellow that I had killed, it might have been different; and they

would have done a little reasoning among themselves."

"But what are they going to do with us now?" I asked.

"They're going to bring us to a trial of some kind. But don't forget that we've got a very powerful advocate."

CHAPTER XI.

Before the Throne of Venus

ONE of the things which at first surprised me after our surrender was the fact that they did not throw a "crew" aboard our craft, instead of allowing us to navigate it unguarded. But this, after Edmund had told his story, only tended to strengthen my faith in Ala.

While we were dropping down toward the city, with a great throng of air-ships attending us, Edmund opened his heart concerning another curious point in the difficulties besetting us.

"I suppose you noticed how close we were to the cloud dome," he said. "Well, there's nothing surprising in the existence of a shell of clouds surrounding this part of Venus. Astronomers on earth looking at her long ago suspected it, and it strikes me as a providential thing for these people. Without it they could not endure the unending sunshine. But it's going to render it difficult for us to make them understand where we come from."

"How so?" asked Jack.

"Because they have never seen a star, and they can have no idea of the existence of other planets. The cloud dome floats above the level to which they can rise with safety, so I am sure that they have never penetrated it. Even if they did get above it, they would not see much on account of the sunshine. There would still be enough air there to diffuse the rays and make objects in the heavens invisible."

"But what difference does it make whether they know that we come from the earth, or think that we are from the other side of their own planet?"

"It makes this difference," Edmund replied, "that if they could be made to understand that we are entirely foreign to their world, they might treat us with greater consideration. Everything helps, and I have no doubt that the inspiration is as active here as it is at home. Anyway, I mean to do my best to make them understand where we come from."

When we returned to the great palace a change of treatment awaited us.

Preparing to Meet the Ruler

INSTEAD of being conducted to a dungeon, we were led into a splendid apartment, and a repast was spread before us. We had need of it, for we had had nothing to eat since our escape. The room in which we found ourselves had no windows, but it was brilliantly lighted from the walls by something resembling the mercury vapor lamps we have at home.

Edmund thought that they were based upon a similar principle. We were placed at a table, Juba with us, and food was set before us. I observed that, as among the inhabitants of the caverns, the food consisted mainly of vegetables, except that

there were birds of a sort unknown to us, but of an exquisite taste.

More interesting than the food, however, were those who served it. They were beautiful girls, attired after the manner of all the inhabitants here, and extremely graceful in their movements.

Jack was captivated at once.

"Jove!" he cried. "This is something like! Edmund, I'm obliged to you once more. I wish I could speak the language."

"You can," said Edmund, "but you don't know it. They understand you better than you think, and you would do well to keep a guard upon yourself."

Jack, however, was irrepressible. He ogled the pretty waitresses; and presently, with an engaging smile—or what he intended as such—he ventured to touch one of them on the arm. You should have seen the effect!

The girl drew herself up and escaped from his touch as if it had been that of a serpent. Then she looked at him. How she did look! It was a glance that shot straight through him.

But her resentment did not last. A minute later she smiled, and her beauty seemed more dazzling than before. Jack was quite overcome. He made an awkward attempt to express an apology, which was instantly comprehended; and the behavior of the girl and of her companions indicated that, while they would suffer no familiarity, they were easily mollified and wished us no ill.

They gave very little attention to Juba, who, nevertheless, blinked at them from under his eyeshades, and was evidently more amazed by their beauty than we were.

"You see," said Edmund, "that you are not among savages here. New York restaurant manners won't pass on Venus."

Suddenly Jack, whose thoughts were always jumping about, turned from his admiration of the girls and exclaimed.

"See here, Edmund, why in the world didn't they shoot at us when we were running away? There were enough of them to bring us down, even if they had been bad marksmen."

"They didn't shoot," was the reply, "because they've nothing to shoot with. I've already told you that I think they are an unwarlike people. But they're not cowards. You've seen evidence enough of that. They were not terrified by my killing that fellow, and I reckon that they'll fight if there should be occasion for fighting. Only I think that they are not natural slaughterers, like us, and I shouldn't be surprised if war is unknown on Venus."

"All the same, I'm glad we've got our automatic pistols yet," said Jack.

"Yes," Edmund responded, "and we may have occasion for them; and for the rifles, too, if we can get them back; but it may be that they'll prove useful in a way very different from what you imagine."

We did not press Edmund for an explanation of this remark; but I was sure he had some particular reason for what he had said, and I turned it over in my mind without arriving at any conclusion.

When our repast was finished a number of "cops," as Jack gaily dubbed them, came to conduct us from the refectory.

"Now, for the Supreme Court, or the King's Bench!" said Jack.

It was even as he had surmised. We were led through a maze of passages and elegant chambers, until we emerged into a vast and splendid apartment. It was nearly square—at least a hundred feet the longest way—and, like the place where we had dined, lighted from the walls and ceiling. The floor seemed to be of rose-colored marble, and the walls and ceiling were composed of equally rich materials, most beautifully decorated. But what absolutely fascinated the eye in this great apartment was the play of living colors, projected from a huge circle, high on the wall, at the farther end.

Chromatic Music

CHROMATIC music again," said Edmund.

Just as at a great reception on the earth an orchestra pours forth soft melodies to entrance the senses of the guests, while not inhibiting their conversation, so here this harmonic play of delightful colors filled the air, to the evident delectation of the brilliant throng that was assembled. Even we felt the effect stealing deliciously through our nerves.

As a way was cleared for us, everybody standing aside to make room when we advanced, we caught sight—at the head of the vista, thus formed through the center of the apartment—of a magnificent throne, and seated upon it was Ala.

Then she must, indeed, be the queen! But immediately I noticed, with some disappointment, that she was not alone.

By her side, and occupying another throne hardly less brilliant than hers, was a tall man, with features like those of a Greek statue of Zeus, and long curling hair as white as snow. The severity of his aspect formed a discouraging contrast with the smiling beauty of the queen.

Now, you will understand, of course, that everything that followed in the way of communication between these people and us was conducted by those peculiar methods of interchanging thoughts and ideas which I have before described. There was no talking, except in very low tones, among the chief actors on the other side. It was a repetition of what had occurred during the parley between the airplanes.

Yet, so expressive were the countenances before us, and so transparent the meaning of the gestures, that even Jack, Henry, and I could catch considerable of the drift, while Edmund seemed to understand it astonishingly well. What was visible recorded itself in my memory, but the details of what occurred in the way of communication were related to me afterward by Edmund. For the sake of clearness I am going to treat it practically as if it had been a regular conversation. While I may thus be compelled to use words which were not actually spoken, yet the meaning was there.

As soon as our examination begun the colors ceased to play from the circle above the throne.

"Orchestra stopped," whispered the irrepressible Jack in my ear.

The first person to speak, if I may so put it, was Ala. She fixed her eyes upon Edmund in the peculiar manner which we had already learned to recognize as preliminary to a wordless conversation,

and her face became more expressive than that of the most perfect actress I have ever seen. One could read upon it the question:

"Who are you, and whence came you?"

I was thrilled with pride as I glanced at Edmund. He stood alone, close before the throne, in an open space, while we were placed a little at one side. He carried himself erect, without a sign of trepidation, with an air of complete confidence and self-control, and almost, I thought, of superiority. The painting of "Columbus Before Isabella" flashed upon my recollection, though the circumstances were so different.

As the question beamed to him, he lifted his hand and pointed significantly overhead. Evidently, he was going at once to proclaim our origin from another world. I remembered what he had lately said about the difficulty of making these people comprehend such a thing, and I thought I could detect the perplexity in Ala's mind.

Edmund's gesture spoke plainly enough, but in reading his thought she met an insuperable obstacle. She could not comprehend the idea of another world in the sky.

Juba Comes to Their Assistance

It was then that Juba unexpectedly came to our aid. He had been watching the proceedings with intense interest, and I was delighted by the comprehension which he showed. Although possessing a much lower order of intelligence than the brilliant beings who surrounded us, and nothing of their culture, yet he was an inhabitant of their planet, and who can tell what ancient ancestral lines may have connected them?

His people, too, shared in the singular power of communicating ideas without words which was characteristic of intellectual life on Venus. To him, on the other hand, there was little mystery in what Edmund was trying to make known. He was familiar with the starry sky and a worshipper of the earth.

With boldness that surprised me, he stepped to Edmund's side, and, lifting the shades from his eyes, joined—if I may so say—in the conversation. Ala and her white-haired companion stared at him, a little startled at first by his interference. But it was clear in a minute that they understood him.

He made them, at least, partially comprehend that above the dome of clouds there was another world known to him, and that we came from thence. No doubt that thought had been in his mind before. He also, it was plain, made them realize the fact that he himself belonged to their own planet—to the dark, mysterious side of it—which they had vainly sought to penetrate. Wonder overspread their faces as the truth dawned upon them.

I could feel all eyes now turned upon us with redoubled interest and curiosity. I believed that I could detect a deepening of color in Ala's cheeks as she again confronted Edmund's glance.

Thus the ice was broken, and, the fundamental idea being communicated, it rested upon Edmund alone to conduct the affair again. I saw that the examination was taking another direction.

Whether they were satisfied or not about our claims to be inhabitants of another world, they were evidently not disposed to let us off on that ac-

count. And I thought that the white-haired Zeus seemed especially insistent on this point, and I detested him for it.

I tried to imagine what he was, but I couldn't satisfy myself. King, or judge, or priest, or what? Jack saw the new drift also, and whispered to me:

"The old scoundrel! I'd like to try my pistol on him!"

For the first time the old man, who, I must confess, possessed a dignity of bearing that was extremely imposing; looked Edmund squarely in the eye and used some significant gestures. Edmund did not quail. But the rest of us certainly did when a way was suddenly opened in the throng, and the body of the fellow that had been shot, lying on a rich bier, was borne into the centre of the open space and set down at Edmund's feet.

A Beautiful Heroine

HE glanced at it perfectly unmoved; and then, with a smile, turned to look at Ala. Her manner assured me that she understood the justification that he claimed for himself, and that, at least, she approved it.

But old Zeus was not to be placated. That was plain by his look. Ala spoke to him earnestly, calling into action all the means of communicating thoughts, ideas, and arguments that they possessed in such abundance; but he was immovable. At length she turned to Edmund, and some communication took place between them which puzzled him for little while; but suddenly a light broke over his countenance, and, turning aside his head, he sent my hopes plump down to zero with ten solemn words:

"The old judge is the father of the dead man!"

"Then there's no hope for us," I muttered.

"Wait and see," was the reply.

Everything depended upon Ala. Assuming that she was interested in Edmund and wished to save him, had she the power to do it? Was she really queen, as we had supposed? And, if so, was her authority unlimited?

These questions raced through my mind while a conference took place round the throne. Several dignified-looking individuals, with gems glittering on their toga-like garments, were called into consultation. There was plainly a division among them. I could see that some sided with Ala, and others with the old man.

The features of the latter became more and more stern; but as he continued to insist upon his revengeful purpose, a strange light began to glow in Ala's eyes. Her color deepened. Lines of strength appeared in her beautiful face. One could feel the resistance that she offered rising to a passion; and at last, at a particularly savage communication from her relentless opponent, she suddenly rose to her feet, transformed!

The majestic splendor of her countenance was thrilling. Lifting her jeweled arms, she commanded the attendants to remove the bier, and was instantly obeyed. Then she beckoned to Edmund; and as he approached the foot of the throne, she descended three steps, rested her hand upon his shoulder, and looked about her with an air which said plainer than words:

"It is the power of my protection that environs him. Touch him, you who dare!"

CHAPTER XII.

The Value of a Good Fist

THE sensation produced by Ala's dramatic interruption was indescribable. Everybody pressed nearer. Murmurs rose on all sides, whether of approval or dissent I had no time to guess. The white-haired judge, his face afame with passion, sprang to his feet, with uplifted hand, as if about to attack Edmund. Instinctively, I felt for my pistol. But Edmund, as if he had divined my thought, glanced sharply at me and shook his head.

We did not appreciate then what Ala had done, but we soon learned what it was.

Her act and her gesture had conveyed to the minds of the others a meaning unguessed by us. According to the immortal customs of her race, in thus embracing Edmund with her arm, she had not merely taken him under her protection—she had proclaimed to all the world that he was her chosen mate. If we had known this at the beginning, we should have been able to understand the tremendous excitement in the assemblage.

And yet it ought to have been evident, too, from her expression. If ever defiant, self-sacrificing love wrote itself upon a woman's face, it was visible in hers. She had need of all her resolution; for the anger of the old man on the throne was nothing in comparison with the fury of a new actor who now thrust himself to the front. It was the Apollo-like young man who had led her from the air ship on our first arrival at the aerial tower.

A Rival Suitor, Ingra, and An Encounter

NO explanations were needed to enable us to understand the relation in which he stood to the parties. He was evidently Ala's suitor, and jealousy had turned him into a maniac. He shouldered aside those who stood in his path, and in an instant confronted Edmund. He was more than six feet tall, broad-shouldered, and had the powerful build of an athlete.

My heart leaped into my throat, and again I gripped my pistol; but Edmund's recent warning restrained me. Then, once more, a glow of admiration for our leader ran through me. He faced his formidable enemy without the slightest fear or flinching. Only I saw that his fists were clinched, and the recollection flashed upon me that he had been the favorite pupil of the best boxing master in New York.

In a fraction of a second the two glared at each other; while Ala, with a low cry, sought to draw Edmund away. But the other sprang forward, like a maddened bull.

Whack! Edmund's right fist caught his opponent on the point of the jaw, and the fellow shot back into the crowd and tumbled in a heap.

Lightning is not quicker than was Edmund's next move.

"Out with your pistols and follow me!" he shouted to us, and seizing Ala, he pushed his way through the throng, which gave back at his im-

petuous onset. We were after him in an instant, pistols in hand.

The sight of the latter had its effect. They knew the power of the mysterious weapon, and their momentary fear gave us an initial advantage. Still, that would have availed us nothing in the end, but for the fact, which Edmund had counted upon, that there was a large portion of the assemblage who were our friends—or, rather, friends of Ala—and disposed to take her part.

Edmund had noted where her advocates were most numerous in the throng, and toward them he pushed. In a few seconds they had closed round us. The uproar became deafening. I doubt if ever so much noise was made on Venus before. It seemed to drive the crowd wild.

But Ala proved her queenly quality. With a proud air she drew herself erect, her eyes flashed, and with a few commanding gestures she reduced those immediately about us to silence. Then, at her order, an escort was formed, we were placed in the midst of it, and slowly we marched through the press toward the entrance to the chamber.

In the Queen's Audience Chamber

NO resistance was offered. The faces about us rather expressed astonishment than any intention at interference. Glancing behind, I saw the white head of the old man on the throne, violently agitated; but if he gave any orders concerning us, they were not executed, and without opposition we passed out of the door.

Turning to the right, we quickly entered an apartment—smaller than the others—but no less splendid. Here there was another throne. Ala advanced to it, mounted the steps, retaining Edmund's hand; and taking her seat, calmly faced the spectators, while we stood close by, at the foot of the throne.

I think it will be best, in view of the dramatic events which were to follow, to tell you, in as few words as possible, the result of the episode that I have just described.

The room in which we now found ourselves was the private audience chamber of the queen. The apartment in which the examination had taken place was a kind of combination of a royal audience chamber and a supreme court-room. It seems that under the laws of Venus there was a sort of joint jurisdiction between the queen and the supreme judge.

In all judicial cases the two presided together.

At least, the queen had the right to preside with the judge whenever she chose. It certainly did not strike me as a very wise arrangement, for in case of disagreement how were they to arrive at a decision without a third person to cast a deciding vote?

That, however, was none of our affair, and it was lucky for us that on this occasion the queen had not only chosen to exercise her prerogative, but had bent the law to her authority. I suspect that it usually happened that way whenever her feelings were interested, for a woman will have her way whether she lives on the earth or on Venus.

Owing probably to the fact that the victim of Edmund's pistol was the son of the venerable supreme judge, all of Ala's arguments in extenuation

of the offense had been wasted until, seeing the imminent danger—her love though, perhaps, hardly appreciated by herself—suddenly flamed forth, and she determined to save Edmund at any cost.

Our Case a Just One

THE essential justice of our case was so evident to any unprejudiced mind that the sympathy of the majority of the audience had really been with the queen all the time, and to that fact we owed our escape.

The insane jealousy of Ala's unfortunate suitor had greatly complicated the situation, and was to be a source of trouble for us in the future; but his adherents were not numerous enough to threaten serious danger after we had once found refuge in the queen's apartment.

Her authority asserted itself in full force, and, as far as we were concerned, the episode seemed to be closed.

After the excitement about the trial and the scene that followed it had died down, we were assigned to a suite of apartments in the palace, Juba always remaining with us. We were continually on our guard, and all kept a sharp lookout for Ingra, the disappointed suitor, and his emissaries, because we had not the least doubt that he would have spies on our track, and would make away with us if he could. But for a long time we saw nothing of him.

Without our calendar clock we lost track of the time; for here, where it was always daylight, there was nothing to count by. Yet sleep, as we found, was no less necessary on Venus than on the earth. These people spent about as much time in bed as we do, retiring for the purpose into unlighted apartments.

Of course we saw Ala frequently; and as it became gradually easier for us to comprehend one another, we learned many interesting things.

She had succeeded to the throne on the death of her mother, who had been queen before her. Here there were no kings, the succession passing always to women. Her father was also dead, and she had no brothers or sisters.

A Question of Inheritance

IF she should die without leaving a daughter, the throne would pass to a collateral line. The question of her marriage was therefore of the first importance. Ingra, the pretender to her hand, was of royal blood, and he had the backing of a strong faction. He was Ala's third cousin, and though a young man of great beauty, she had no liking for him.

Ala herself was an extraordinary person, universally admired, not only for her beauty and her kindly nature, but even more for her intellectual gifts. She possessed a great deal of enlightened curiosity, and the expedition toward the mysterious land of night had been both led and planned by her.

As Edmund had surmised, the inhabitants of their side of Venus were not a warlike people. They all belonged to one race and one kingdom. Only a part of the daylight hemisphere was inhabited, a broad, ring-shaped area, with temperate climate,

lying between the land of storms and and ice on the one hand, and the torrid circle on the other.

The torrid circle occupied the central part of the hemisphere, and there the unbroken sunshine created a climate that was absolutely inhibitory to life.

So much it is necessary to premise for an understanding of the events that followed.

As the time passed, we began to become anxious to learn what had been done with our car, and in a minor degree we were interested concerning the automatic rifles, which had been taken away from us at the start. We knew that all of these things had been brought to the capital, but we were ignorant of their location. We were afraid, too, that they might fall into the hands of those who were inimical to us, and be either destroyed or permanently concealed.

As the intimacy between Edmund and Ala increased, and their unconcealed attachment became more pronounced in its expression, the rest of us felt a little anxiety concerning its ultimate bearing upon our fate. We had no idea of staying all our lives on Venus; but if Edmund should decide to stay, what would become of us? At last we determined to question him, and Jack volunteered to be the spokesman.

"See here, Edmund," he began, "this is love's young dream with a vengeance. But you are getting all the best of it. You may become king of the planet for aught I see; but these hours are not too amiable to us, and we rather think it's time to talk about the earth again."

Longing for New York

"I think I've had enough of Venus myself. I'd rather like to see old New York once more. Now, what are you going to do about it? How about the car?"

"I have only just learned where it is stored," Edmund replied, "and I was about to speak to you of it. Ala and I have a project, for the carrying out of which the car will be necessary. We'll go and have a look at it; but, first of all, I've got to find some uranium to put it into shape again."

"Well, I hope you'll find your uranium," said Jack; "but what project are you talking about? Are you going to take Ala back to the earth?"

"No," Edmund replied, "or, at least, not now. We've got more exploring to do on Venus. You don't suppose I'm going to quit yet."

Henry, who had never expressed much admiration for what we had seen, fairly groaned.

"Edmund," he said, "if I had a thousand million dollars, I'd give you every cent to take me back home."

He meant it, for I never seen a face so full of misery.

Edmund, however, only smiled, saying:

"Cheer up, Henry; you'll get back, all right, in time. Come—what sort of stuff are you made of? Can't you appreciate the glory of being the first explorers of another world?"

Evidently Henry could not, and just at that moment I doubt if Jack and I could, either. There was nothing for us to do, however, except to await Edmund's movements. We couldn't have navigated the car homeward, if we had had it.

A short time afterward, accompanied by Ala, two of her ladies in waiting, and half a dozen stout fellows belonging to our guard, we went to visit the car. It was away up in the aerial tower where we had first landed, but I was disappointed to see nothing of the rifles.

"I hope they haven't fallen into Ingra's hands," I said to Edmund.

"If they have," he replied, "they'll probably prove more dangerous to him than to anybody else. Even if he learned how to use them, the extra ammunition is all in the car."

Nevertheless, I knew that the rifles carried ten shots each in their chambers; and I didn't like their disappearance, more particularly after learning that Ala was ignorant of their whereabouts.

Plans for Fixing the Car

After thoroughly examining the car, Edmund repeated that he needed only uranium to put the apparatus in first-rate condition. He explained that the jar against the ice precipice, or the violent fall, had produced an "atomic readjustment," which could only be remedied with the aid of fresh material. Of course I knew no more than the man in the moon what he meant; but I was satisfied with the assurance that the thing could be fixed.

Here a new difficulty rose at once. Ala evidently knew nothing about uranium, and had no idea what it was that Edmund wanted. He succeeded only in making her comprehend that he must search for something in the ground.

"Uranium," he said to us, "is sometimes found around silver or lead mines. The first thing is to discover where they do their mining. If we can find uranium, all right. If we can't, we may as well say good-by to the earth, for we'll have to leave our bones on Venus."

CHAPTER VIII

At the Mercy of a Fearful Enemy

EDMUND had no great difficulty in making Ala comprehend that we wished to visit the places where they got their metals.

Accordingly, not long afterward, we started in an airship—escorted by four or five consorts—for an exploration of the mines. Ala, as usual, had her two favorite maids with her.

We went a long distance from the capital, up near the mountains. They value gold on Venus as much as we do on the earth, and, naturally, they were eager first to show us their gold-mines. The sight was amazing.

Talk of California and Australia, of Peru and South Africa! All of them put together never saw so much gold as we beheld in one of those mines! I perceived that Henry's mouth fairly watered at the sight.

Edmund was intent only on his search, and it was delightful to see the tender interest in Ala's eyes as she followed him. But he could find no trace of what he wanted.

"Plague take it!" he exclaimed. "If I had only carried on my experiments a little longer before setting out, I might have been able to get the power I want from any of the metals. But now nothing but uranium will do."

We went from mine to mine, with the same result. Finally we reached the silver mines, and Edmund's hopes brightened. At last he uttered a great shout of joy.

"Here's pitchblende," he said. "All I want now is an electric furnace."

I felt a load fall from my shoulders, because we had already learned that chemistry was no unknown science here. There must be laboratories at the capital, if not in the neighborhood of the mines themselves. This latter conjecture proved to be correct, and the fact saved us a great deal of trouble; otherwise we should have been forced to transport tons of the pitchblende to the capital in order to extract uranium from it.

But there was another result which we did not anticipate—it gave our enemies an opportunity to plot our destruction.

Close by the mines there was a laboratory provided with an excellent electric furnace. When Edmund saw it he expressed his surprise that chemists so able and enterprising had not yet discovered the property of radio-activity possessed by uranium and its compounds. But they knew nothing about it, and we did; and that gave us a great advantage.

A Region of Wonderful Beauty

EDMUND set to work at once, Ala's authority placing everything that he desired in his hands. He shut everybody out of the laboratory except Juba, whom he found useful in various ways. As for us, he said, laughing, that we knew just enough to be stupid and useless.

I think we must have been more than a week there when a terrible thing occurred.

We were accustomed to take our recreation by long walks amid the delightful scenery in the neighborhood of the mines. Although we were among the foot-hills, the elevation was not very great, and the temperature was most agreeable. Nature was at her best. The slopes and valley-bottoms were clothed with vegetation of tropical luxuriance and beauty.

Never have I seen such trees! I did not recognize a single variety known to me at home, and yet they were in no sense grotesque. Many of them were more graceful in form and foliage than any species of palm; others were as massive as oaks; and some as tall and stately as Sequoias. Festoons of flowering vines hung everywhere—and the flowers!

One could never have believed it possible for such hues, such shapes, and such perfumes to exist together outside of a hothouse. To walk through these scenes was like a stroll through paradise.

In one of our walks, Edmund being with us, and Ala and her maids also, we ascended an eminence overlooking the charming valley of a little stream, two or three miles from the mines. There we sat down, at the foot of a lofty tree, to enjoy the view. The air was deliciously soothing; and in a little while Edmund, tired by his long exertions—for he had been at work without rest for forty-eight hours—fell asleep, with his head on a flowery bank, and Ala sitting beside him.

Suddenly a shadow, deeper than that of the foliage, fell around us, and a large airplane swiftly descended in front of the bank.

In an instant twenty men had leaped from it and seized Edmund, Jack, Henry, and myself.

Edmund was dazed with sleep, and the rest of us were paralyzed with surprise, so that—before any effectual resistance could be offered—we found ourselves on the airplane and rapidly ascending through the air. Ala had sprung to her feet and was gesticulating wildly, her maids were overcome with terror, and Juba, who had not been touched by the abductors, remained seated on the ground, apparently dumfounded, and without an idea in his shaggy head.

None of them could have done anything. We rose so rapidly, flying toward the mountains, that in ten minutes even the tree under which we had sat was lost to sight.

Prisoners Again

I glanced about among our captors, expecting to see Ingra. He was not visible; but a few minutes later he appeared, with a derisive smile on his face. Evidently, he had kept out of sight in order not to confront Ala.

Oh! the detestation with which I beheld him! If it had been in my power, I would have ground him to powder! My look, I know, expressed my fury; but he stared at me with that maddening grin of successful cunning which turns an intelligent and handsome face, when it screens a wicked heart, into the cruellest devil's image.

He gloated over Edmund, also; but Edmund never even looked at him. It was the second time that we had been taken like foolish mice in a trap, and I raged at the thought.

Edmund was perfectly cool. As for Jack, his face showed that he felt as I did; but he said nothing, and Henry, who at best seldom spoke, was as silent and as pale as a ghost.

We were allowed to stand, though our arms were bound behind us, and even to walk about the deck. The thought flashed upon me that Ingra would be delighted if we should jump overboard, for that would save him the trouble of putting an end to us. Several times he strode by, and tried to catch Edmund's eye; but Edmund ignored him as completely, as if he had not existed.

As the great airplane swept on at terrific speed, my thoughts turned back to Ala. What would she do? What could she do? She could not follow—at least, not until after a fatal delay—for she would have to return afoot to the mines, three miles away, before she could find aid.

By that time we would be far out of sight among the mountains, leaving no track in the air. I fairly groaned at the thought of the absolute hopelessness of our situation. But, in thinking that Ala could do nothing for us, I underrated her abilities and the inspiring power of love.

Fortunately, after we had lost sight of the tree, the airplane slowed up and came almost to rest. We circled about for a while, and Ingra consulted with his co-conspirators.

Their gestures indicated that they were debating as to their course. They pointed this way and that, and finally drove the airplane to a great height to reconnoiter ahead. The delay was providential,

A Pursuer

WHILE we were circling, and while our captors were choosing their course, my eye happened to catch—away off in the sky behind us—a black speck, barely visible. In an instant I was all excitement. I pointed out the object to Edmund.

"For Heaven's sake," he whispered, glancing cautiously round, "don't let these brutes know what we see. Don't seem to notice it. *She is following us!*"

I said nothing to Jack and Henry, who had not seen the object; but I could not withdraw my eyes from it, although I covered and concealed my glances, and tried to seem occupied in looking another way.

Finally Ingra apparently made up his mind, and off we went again. But by this time the speck had enlarged to a distinct black dot in the sky. Manifestly it was overtaking us, and in a little while it had become so plain that the others caught sight of it.

Ingra showed both surprise and anger at the sight. His action was prompt. He issued orders which in half a minute sent us spinning at incredible speed. At the same time he dropped lower, in order that the airplane might be lost against the background of the mountains.

But that black dot followed, and I thanked Heaven as I saw that it did not grow smaller. It even seemed to enlarge.

Presently Edmund, who had now begun to watch it with his pocket binocular, handed the glass to me, saying simply:

"Look!"

I looked, and then handed the glass to Jack and Henry, that they might share the pleasure which that sight gave. We could make out clearly the outlines of an airplane. We believed that we recognized it as the one in which Ala had brought us to the mines.

How its driving-screws did spin. Heaven grant that no accident should befall its machinery! It was a chance for life and love on one side, and for revenge on the other, and the speed was pushed up to the utmost limit.

Surmises

SUDDENLY a shocking thought crossed my mind. I tried to banish it, for I feared that Ingra might read it and act upon it. Suppose that he should hurl us overboard!

It was within his power to do so. It would have been a quick and simple solution of the matter; and that the idea apparently did not occur to him, I could only ascribe to a protecting hand that guarded us even in this extremity.

On we rushed through the humming air, and still we did not drop the pursuer. Minute by minute the chasing airplane became more distinct against the bright background of the great cloud dome. Suddenly Edmund touched me and called my attention to something ahead.

"There," he said; "there's their hope and our despair."

I looked and saw that in front of us the sky was dark. Great clouds were rolling up, high above the mountains, and the latter were shadowed by them,

We seemed to be approaching a region of twilight. Once within it we should be lost to sight!

"It is the edge of the temperate zone," said Edmund. "Between that zone and the central circle of eternal, unclouded sunshine lies a region of contending air-currents, rains, and storms, not unlike that which we crossed this side of the Crystal Mountains. Having entered it, we shall be as if behind a curtain, and they can work their will with us."

Was it the knowledge of this fact that had restrained Ingra from throwing us overboard? Was he meditating for us a more dreadful fate?

It was indeed a land of shadows that we now entered. Ahead, we were passing the crest of the mountain-range, which was nowhere of any great height, and even in the gloom we could perceive that ahead of us the inclination of the ground was downward.

I glanced eagerly downward to see if Ala's airplane was yet in pursuit. Yes, there it was, a distinct dot on the bright dome behind, the upper part of which was now beginning to be obscured from our view by the roof of inky clouds that spread darkness round us. We could see them very plainly, but could they see us?

I tried to hope that they could, but reason taught me that it must be impossible. Still, they evidently were holding on their course, and there was a gleam of hope in that.

Ingra's Plotting

BUT even this hope faded when Ingra, with devilish cunning, as soon as we had entered deep into the gloom, abruptly changed our course. He knew well that we were now invisible to our pursuers; but to prevent the bare possibility that they might be able to follow us if we maintained a straight course through the air, he doubled like a hunted fox.

We watched for the effect upon the other airplane. The change of our perspective revealed the fact that they were continuing straight on as before. They had not seen us, then; and even if, as must surely be the case, they anticipated such a ruse as Ingra had practised, how could they baffle him and find our track again? At last the spreading darkness swallowed from sight the arch of illuminated sky behind, and then we were alone in the gloom!

Understand me, this was not the deep night of the other side of the planet. It was more truly what I have already called it, twilight—a dark twilight, and as our eyes became accustomed to it we could see a little.

We had dropped down within a few hundred yards of the ground, which had now become a level expanse, and soon we began to notice that it was covered with small bodies of water, interspersed with masses of trees and bushes. It was, in short, a gigantic dismal swamp or everglade.

I shuddered as the evident design of Ingra burst upon my consciousness. He meant either to throw us in the morass, or to leave us to starve in the midst of these fens. His real design, as you will see in a moment, was even more diabolical.

The airplane gradually approached the ground, just skimming the tops of strange trees, the most

horrible vegetable forms that I have ever seen. At length we settled down upon a comparatively dry space, perhaps a quarter of an acre in extent; and there, without warning, we were seized and pushed off the airplane, which instantly rose circling above us.

Burning the Bonds

INGRA'S staring face appeared for a moment, and even in the gloom we could see the devilish glee that overspread it. If our arms had not been bound triumph would have been ended then and there. I saw Edmund straining desperately at his bonds to reach his pistol. But in ten seconds the airplane had risen beyond pistol-shot.

"Quick!" said Edmund. "Hold your hand here."

I turned my back to him, and stretched out my fingers, not knowing yet what he wished.

"Take a match from this box which I have twisted out of my side-pocket," he said; "and while I hold the box scratch it and, for Heaven's sake, hold the flames quick against the bonds around my wrists."

I managed to get hold of the match and, finding with my fingers the box, scratched as best I could. But the match broke. Edmund, with the skill of a prestidigitator, got another match out of the box, and pushed it into my fingers. It failed again.

"It's got to be done!" Edmund cried. "Here, Jack, you try."

Again he succeeded in extracting a match, and Jack backed up in my place. Whether his hands happened to be less tightly bound, or whether he had more skill and nerve, on the second attempt it succeeded.

"Don't lose it," cried Edmund, as the light flashed. "Burn the cord."

Jack tried. The smell of burning flesh arose, but Edmund never winced. In a few seconds the match went out.

"Another," said Edmund, and the same operation was repeated. A dozen separate attempts of this kind had been made, when, with a violent effort, Edmund snapped the charred cord, and was free. His hands and wrists were severely burned, but, paying no attention to them, in a minute he had us all cut loose.

It was a mercy that they had not noticed the flame from the airplane, for if they had, undoubtedly they would have returned, and made an end of us before we could have released our hands. Now, gripping our pistols, we felt less anxiety.

We could no longer see the airplane which had been swallowed up in the darkness, but suddenly a loud splash in the water close by startled us. A moment later this was followed by a second and a third splash. We had dimly caught sight of some long, slender objects, apparently falling from the sky. Instantly Edmund, whose eyes were marvelously quick, sung out:

A Monster on Venus

"IT'S the rifles!"

"The rifles?"

"Yes. Ingра had them, and he has thrown them overboard." And at the words Edmund dashed into the shallow water, where the splashing had occur-

red. In a minute he returned, with one of our cruising rifles in his hand!

"Hunt for the others!" he exclaimed, and we ran with him into the water, and actually found the other two sticking in the mud, for the water was not more than a foot deep.

"Heaven be praised!" said Edmund. "This is a piece of luck."

"I should think so," said Jack dryly. "It's positively humorous."

"In Heaven's name," I exclaimed, "why did he throw them overboard? Not for us, surely!"

"Of course not," said Edmund. "It's plain enough. He had taken them, but couldn't find out how to use them. He did not want to carry this evidence of his guilt back with him, and so it occurred to him to get rid of them along with us. No doubt when he cast them out the airplane was away, and high up. He never dreamed that they would fall within our reach.

"But you observe the heavy wind that is blowing overhead. The weapons are light, and the wind carried them our way. If the airplane had not been so high up they never would have reached us."

Dumbfounded, the rest of us said nothing, except Jack, who grumbled:

"Hanged if I don't think this kind of luck is uncanny."

"I cannot be thankful enough for the return of the rifles," said Edmund presently. "We shall have use for them. Without them I doubt if it would ever have been possible for us to pull out of this trap."

"It seems to me," said Jack, "that three pairs of seven-league boots would be more to the purpose just now than three rifles. What are you going to shoot?"

Edmund started to reply, but was interrupted by another noise—not a splash this time, but a heavy, sonorous, sighing sound. In the gloom, surrounded by the repulsive, half-spectral forms of the monstrous vegetation of the swamp, that mysterious sound, which plainly denoted some giant kind of life, fairly made us quake.

"My Heavens!" said Jack, "what can that be?"

"We'll see," replied Edmund calmly, and threw open his pocket-lantern. As the light streamed out there was a sudden rustle close by and an answering gleam, which passed a shaft of light illumination over us. With a united shout of joy we all cried out:

"Ala!"

It was indeed she with her airplane, within a dozen yards of us, but her approach had been concealed by the distorted limbs of the hideous vegetation that towered on three sides of us.

Our shout of astonishment had not ceased to echo when out of the horrible tangle rose, with a swift, sinuous movement, a long, anaconda-like arm, flesh-pink in the electric beam, but covered with dark, spike-edged spiracles.

It curled itself over the edge of the airplane and swiftly drew it downward.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Strange Victory

THE airplane tipped as it descended, and, with confused cries, most of its crew tumbled off, some falling into the water, others disappearing in the tangled vegetation. The light went out, but Edmund's lamp continued to burn.

We could see Ala, as the machine sank lower and crashed through the branches, clinging desperately to an upright on the inclined deck.

The awful arm was clasped about the steel-work within a foot of her!

With a terrible cry, Edmund dashed into the matted growths, madly fighting his way through. Jack and I followed, but Henry sank upon the wet ground, helpless through sheer terror.

"That's the fate they intended for us!" Edmund shouted. "But, by Heaven, it shall not come to *her!*"

If we had had far to go, we should never have been able to get through that awful mass. Even in the excitement of the moment I shrank from the hateful touch of those twisted branches, clammy as the skin of serpents.

But Edmund regarded nothing except his purpose. He battled maniacally with the obstacles in his path, leaving an opening for us at his heels. Through it all we hung on to our rifles, feeling that this alone could save us.

I suppose it was not more than two minutes before we emerged into a comparatively open place—and then the sight that met us!

In the midst of the opening, but half visible in the gloom, on huge squat legs, stood such a monster as you have perhaps read of in books on paleontology, but the equal of this one no geologist ever imagined.

I don't know how large its body was, but its gigantic three-cornered head looked as big as a beer-vat, and from the front of the head issued something resembling the trunk of an elephant, but as large as a dozen. The eye on that side of the head which was turned toward us glowed like an ember in the light of Edmund's lamp.

The creature was crushing the airplane, bending its sides like pasteboard with that mighty trunk. For my part, I was paralyzed by the awful spectacle, but Edmund's sharp command brought me to my senses.

"Hold the lamp!"

Mechanically I took it in my hand. Then I saw Edmund aiming his rifle.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Ten times the shots rang out, zipping one on the heels of another, and I knew that the chamber was exhausted.

"Give me your rifle!"—to Jack.

But it was unneeded. At the very first shot I saw the monster's red eye go dull, and I believe that every bullet entered his brain. He was so huge and unwieldy that he couldn't fall like an ordinary animal. He released the wrecked airplane, threw his vast trunk, heaving in agony and, thrashing the branches over his head, sank upon his immense knees, and slowly rolled down in the sedgy mud.

Without a moment's hesitation, Edmund rushed forward, and a minute later I saw him carrying Ala.

The Monster Is Dead

SHE had fainted, but was uninjured. A little stimulant brought her round, and, lying in his arms, she looked at him, dazed at first, and then with such an expression as I should like just once to encounter in a woman's eyes.

While we were thus engaged, Juba appeared, his white furry body thick with mud, and his huge eyes actually comical in their mingled look of amazement and terror. Presently, half a dozen of the men who had been thrown from the airplane fought their way to us.

"Quick now, boys," said Edmund. "We've got to fix up a shelter."

Still carrying Ala, he led the way to the airplane. Its light steel frame was badly bent in places, but it had settled right side up, and a short inspection showed that it was not a hopeless wreck.

"If the machinery is not seriously injured," said Edmund, "we shall be all right. But we can't get out of this straight away, and I must have a safe and dry place for Ala, while I examine the thing and collect the survivors."

"Just look at that beast," exclaimed Jack, pointing to the huge carcass of the slain monster.

"Better see if there are other live ones round," returned Edmund sharply. "Use your eyes and ears as you never did in your life, while I look at the machinery."

Gently placing Ala in a secure place on the now level deck, Edmund began to explore the mechanism of the airplane. In a few minutes he turned on its powerful electric light, which lit up the strange scenery around us like a full moon.

"You may draw the creatures upon us," I said.

"Yes," Edmund replied, "but it's just as likely to scare them off. In any event, I've got to have plenty of light. Where's Henry?"

"Back there, paralyzed with fear," I replied.

"Go and find him, one of you."

Once More in the Air

JACK and I looked at one another. Jack made a wry face, and probably I did the same. It manifestly had to be done, however, and, taking the pocket-lamp, we gingerly crept back through the terrible thicket, and found Henry still seated on the ground. He remained speechless as we led him to the airplane and seated him upon it. So perfect a picture of abject fright I had never seen. Yet I pitied him from the bottom of my heart, for Henry had his good qualities.

In the meantime, Edmund pursued his investigations, aided finally by the engineer of the craft and two or three of his assistants, who, guided by the light, had struggled out of the swamp. In perhaps an hour's time the airplane was pronounced in fit condition for flight. No more monster beasts had made their appearance, although three or four times we had heard them moving about at no great distance, and, with beating hearts, had gripped the two rifles that remained loaded.

Jack's good nature was restored, and he couldn't refrain from expressing again his opinion that the way those rifles had come back to us beat all the fish-yarns he had ever heard.

"Now you'd never have dared to invent a story like that," he said to me.

I confessed that I wouldn't, and added that I wouldn't have dared invent anything that had occurred on this expedition.

"You'd better be thankful for what has happened," Edmund interrupted, "and not be railing at Providence when it interferes in your behalf."

When everything was ready, we listened for a while to learn if any survivors yet remained unfound. Finally, hearing nothing, Edmund called out: "All aboard!"

I never learned how many, if any, had been lost.

At any rate, we were a company of fifteen, including Juba, when, at last, we circled up into the air and left that awful place.

Ala, as the nervous shock wore off, resumed her queenly air, but with it there was mingled an expression of fond admiration for Edmund that warmed my heart. If ever a couple were born for one another, I thought they were. Yet they had been born a long way apart!

The Return

THE crew of the airplane seemed to know the way well enough, once we were aloft, and after but a momentary hesitation, our course was set, and we began to speed at a great elevation. Finally, we caught sight of the arc of daylight far away, and it gradually rose and spread, until we emerged from under the cap of dark vapors and the region of twilight into the now familiar land of the great seashell-tinted cloud-dome.

Edmund remained for a long time communing with Ala, but at last he approached us.

Henry, meanwhile, had recovered a little equanimity.

"I suppose," Edmund began, "that you would like to know how they found us."

"Upon my word," I said, "I never thought about that in the confusion that we have gone through. But, yes indeed, we should like to know how under heaven they ever managed it."

Thereupon Edmund sat down and told us the story as he had learned it from Ala and the others. It seemed that Juba had finally been our savior, though, of course, it was Ala who had inspired and managed the whole thing.

When they saw us snatched away from under the tree, they instantly comprehended Ingra's plot, and, calling upon the others to follow, Ala ran like a deer for the mines. Juba alone was able to keep up with her, the two handmaidens being left far behind in the race. Fortunately, most of the way was down hill.

"I guess they made those three miles in less than fifteen minutes," said Edmund, smiling with a fond glance at Ala.

Arrived at the mines, Ala instantly ordered her airplane under way, with the best crew she could find at a moment's notice. She knew what to do first.

She had long since lost sight of us, but she had noted the direction of our flight and her first measure was to rise rapidly to a great elevation so as to command a wide prospect, at the same time in order not to lose valuable ground, making toward the mountains.

Ingra's delay in choosing his course, and his oversight in going to a great height, aided our pur-

suers, and they soon caught a glimpse of us, a mere speck in the air, miles and miles away.

Ala immediately ordered top speed. She drove the machine at such a rate that, as Edmund made out the story, her engineer protested. But she would listen to nothing.

Faster and faster their driving-fans spun, until they seemed about to whirl themselves off their shafts. They soon had the satisfaction to see that they were gaining, for Ala's airplane was one of the swiftest.

Slowly they drew up on us, until the twilight borders were reached, and then their hopes quickly faded. As we entered under the dark clouds, we were swallowed from sight.

Ala's heart gave way, and finally, in an agony of despair, she sank upon the deck. She knew too well the horrible fate that Ingra had prepared for his rival.

Juba to the Rescue

THEN it was that Juba unexpectedly came to the rescue. Possessing already the basis of the wordless language that was employed by them, he had little difficulty in learning how to communicate with Ala's people, and seeing her despair, and comprehending the purpose of the chase, he now respectfully approached her and made her understand that he could *see in the dark*. He had lived all his life in a land of shadow and of night, and his eyes, while half blinded in the light, were exactly suited for the conditions that now confronted them.

He proved the truth of his assertion, or tried to, by pointing out the escaping craft, averring that it was perfectly visible to him. Ala was filled with joy at this happy turn of events. Immediately she recovered her self-command, and gave orders to all her crew that Juba's directions should be implicitly followed.

With the shades removed from his great eyes, Juba took his place on the prow of the airplane and guided its course. Without the slightest delay, without abating their fearful speed, they plunged into the gloom, straight on our track.

When Ingra made his sudden change, of course Juba saw the manoeuvre and turned it against its inventor, for now Ingra himself could not see his pursuer, and could not know that he was still followed. The nose of the bloodhound is not more certain in the chase than were Juba's eyes in that terrible flight through the darkness.

They continued to gain upon us so rapidly that they were close at hand when Ingra rose from the swamp after pitching us out. Following Juba's indications, the pilot was about to dash at the escaping airplane, when Ala, divining what had been done, checked him, and ordered him to seek the spot where she was sure that we had been left, by Ingra's orders, to be devoured by the monsters of the morass.

But even Juba's eyes could not locate us, hidden as we were on the dark, swampy ground and amid the twisted vegetation. Having commanded the pilot to descend near the ground, Ala was beginning a careful search, which even yet might have failed, when the sudden flashing out of Edmund's lamp told them where we were.

I need not tell you how breathlessly we listened

to this narration. When it was finished we all looked at Juba with a kindly interest, such as we had never before felt toward him. But Jack's interest in, and gratitude toward him, ran into enthusiasm.

He sprang to his feet, danced upon the deck, to the amazement of our friends, and, approaching Juba, slapped him upon the back, with a joyous laugh, exclaiming:

"Good old boy! Come down to New York and I'll take care of you!"

CHAPTER XV.

Wild Eden

HE stopped at the mines, and Edmund, as coolly as if nothing had happened, resumed his work in the laboratory.

What had passed between him and Ala, in regard to Ingra and his co-conspirators, I do not know, but I remember that sometimes there was a grim look on Edmund's face when he sat silently meditating, which I interpreted as an ill omen for his enemies.

Several times an airplane was despatched to the capital, apparently on a secret mission. In an incredibly short time sufficient uranium had been accumulated to answer Edmund's needs, and then with the precious stuff on board, we set out on our return.

On reaching the capital, we had a magnificent reception.

The news of what had occurred had been noised abroad, and Ala's friends were out in force to welcome her. If Ingra's partisans were on hand, they took good care not to let themselves be known.

Ala's popularity had immensely increased, because her romance took the hearts of her people by storm. Edmund's stock rose, and ours along with it.

I shall attempt no description of the reception, only saying that it was similar in character to the one which had attended our first arrival, though far more gorgeous in details.

Edmund was too much absorbed in his work to waste time on these things. He immediately sought the car, and devoted himself to its preparation. Four or five days may have elapsed before he announced the completion of his work. Then he called us together.

"I believe the car to be all right now," he said, "and I am going to make a trial trip. You can all go, and I'll take Ala and one of her maids along, leaving Juba here."

Exploring Venus

I SHALL not soon forget that trip!

At the start we were delighted. It seemed like home to be once more inside the familiar car, and to watch Edmund manipulating the revolving knobs that governed the mysterious force. Henry begged Edmund to take us back to the earth at once, but Edmund refused.

"I'm not yet done with Venus," he said. "There's lots of things here that we haven't seen. Now that we've got the car in shape, we can make rapid work of it."

Jack's spirits had risen to a high pitch with the

knowledge that the means of return were once more in our hands, and he joined in with Edmund.

"Of course, we won't go back yet," he said. "I want to see Edmund crowned king of the planet first."

An enormous crowd assembled to see us off. I believe that the capital was more populous than London, and everybody in it was on the alert when we launched the car from one of the upper stories of the great tower. The air was crowded with gay airplanes and air-ships, banners and streamers were displayed on all sides, and the atmosphere bloomed with undulating colors.

The noise was extraordinary for Venus, and a universal cry of astonishment burst forth when the car, without visible machinery, swiftly rose into the air and circled over the city. The airplanes chased us like children following a street organ, but soon Edmund touched a knob, and we shot up, rocket-like, leaving them all behind and below.

Higher and higher we rose, until the vast roof of the cloud-dome was reached. From that immense elevation the whole breadth of the inhabited zone appeared spread below us, bordered with luminous clouds along both of its edges. The metropolis looked like a giant flower-bed, and dotted over the country were smaller cities, while innumerable air-planes sailed about far beneath us, like flocks of brilliant-plumaged birds.

Ala at the Helm

I STUDIED Ala's face to note the effect upon her.

She showed some surprise; but more, her countenance denoted admiration of Edmund, and her enthusiasm was fairly girlish. Yet her quick intelligence manifested itself also, and she attended with keen interest when he showed her how the controlling knobs were managed.

He even permitted her to turn some of the controllers, and her delight knew no bounds when she found how easily, under his guidance, she could direct our course. Now we shot along under the dome like a meteor, now we darted downward, and then we ventured a little way up into the clouds.

I was surprised though, of course, I ought not to have been, to find that when we entered the cloud-dome the darkness around us was hardly noticeable. The clouds, although close-packed, were filtered through with sunshine from above, so that we seemed to be immersed in a rose-pink mist.

Ala exhibited no fear whatever, and, at length, Edmund proposed that we should rise up through the dome into outer space.

We did this rapidly, so that in a few minutes we emerged on the upper side, and Venus was changed into a vast white globe, brilliant with sunlight, but as soft in appearance as a ball of wool. The world below was completely hidden.

Only one thing astonished Ala—the sun. It was too blindingly brilliant to look upon, but frequently I saw her turn in its direction with an expression that greatly puzzled me. I did not understand it until afterward.

Then now occurred one of those things which are bound to happen whenever two persons as much interested in one another as were Ala and Edmund, are together, and one of them tries to be particularly agreeable to the other.

Apollo, in the old legend, was not guilty of a greater indiscretion, when he allowed Phaeton to take the reins of the horses of the sun, than was Edmund, when Ala, a little vain of what she had learned, asked to be allowed to guide the car.

He foolishly consented, and the consequences were prompt in declaring themselves.

Trouble with the Car

EDMUND had worked up to a pretty lively clip, and we may have been making ten miles a minute, when Ala's desire to try her hand alone was gratified. She had hardly grasped one of the knobs when my consciousness went off skylarking and, as I quickly found out, the same thing happened to everyone in the car. You will easily imagine what had occurred—inadvertently Ala had brought us to the right-about, which flung us off our feet with such violence that we were knocked senseless.

When I came to myself and got on my legs, Edmund had already recovered, and was working desperately at the controllers. I knew from the motion that he was trying to stop us. The car shook as if it would fall to pieces, jolt following jolt, like an express train under emergency brakes. Blood was running down his face, and, with a quick motion, he wiped it out of his eyes, without ever ceasing his labor at the knobs. Seeing, more by instinct than by looking, that I had recovered, he cried out:

"For heaven's sake, Albert, look to Ala!"

She lay senseless near the center of the car, while Jack and Henry had been pitched into a corner, and the maid lay beside a bench.

I lifted Ala, and, after being jerked from my feet two or three times, succeeded in placing her on one of the benches against the wall. I could see Edmund's anxious glances over his shoulder, but he could not quit his place, nor for an instant remit his exertions.

Beautiful Ala

NEVER had the beauty of this queen of Venus seemed so wonderful as when I thus bore her in my arms. I even imagined that Edmund must feel a pang of jealousy. Very gently I placed her upon the cushioned bench, and seeing no blood on her white face and arms, I believed that she had suffered no injury beyond a shock.

Soon she opened her eyes and, as they fell upon Edmund, I realized that I and my exertions in her behalf were already forgotten. She immediately strove to rise, pushing me away, but Edmund, seeing the movement, signaled her to remain where she was.

Docilely she obeyed him, and then for the first time she smiled at me—only to express her gratitude, but it sent the blood into my face.

In the meantime, Jack, Henry, and the maid had recovered. None of them was seriously injured, and they scrambled to their feet. The car by this time had ceased its eccentric movements, and a moment later it came to rest.

I felt that it had touched ground—but where? Edmund instantly ran to Ala's side and began to caress her hands.

"Thank heaven!" he said aloud, and if she did not

understand his words she knew well his meaning.

When we began to bind up the cut on his head I felt like an intruder, and hurried to one of the windows. The first glance outside filled me with astonishment—and well it might!

One would have said that we had descended into the midst of a garden of gorgeous orchids. Strange flowers of the most exquisite beauty, and most extraordinary shapes, hung all about us, some of them brushing against the window. I called Jack and Henry to look at them, and while we stood there gazing, no one speaking a word, a mass of foliage parted, and there emerged into view a bird so dazzlingly splendid in color that we all three muttered a simultaneous "Oh!"

Our exclamation attracted the attention of Ala and Edmund, who at once came to the window. No sooner had she looked out than Ala joyfully clasped her hands and immediately addressed herself to make Edmund understand her thoughts.

After a minute or two, he said to us:

The Birds of Venus

"WE have had great luck! In rushing back to the surface of Venus without knowing where we were going, we have landed, in what I make out from Ala, in a kind of wild Eden, famous for the beauty of its flowers and its birds. She proposes that we shall at once alight from the car, in order to enjoy the singular sights and pleasures which this place affords."

We alighted, accordingly, and found ourselves in a perfect wilderness of the most beautiful flowering shrubs and trees. Pushing aside the branches, we emerged into a kind of arbor, as if it had been a park.

All about us the trees and bushes bent under loads of magnificent blossoms which filled the air with delicious fragrance. Birds were everywhere, and they exhibited no fear, simply keeping out of our reach. Their plumage was the most extraordinary I have ever seen, many of them having long, iridescent feathers depending from their wings and tails.

I noticed that Ala frequently turned toward these birds with a look of ineffable pleasure. At first I thought that she was simply admiring their colors and their graceful shapes and movements, but soon I became convinced that she was not merely looking, but *listening*. This excited my astonishment, for none of us could hear a sound, except the occasional rustle of the branches.

"Edmund," I said at last, "I believe that Ala hears something that we do not."

"Of course she does," he replied. "There is music here. These birds are singing, but our ears are not attuned to their melody. You know the peculiarity of this atmosphere with regard to sound. All these people have a horror of loud noises, but their ears detect sounds that lie far beyond the range of vibrations with which ours are affected."

"There is another thing," he added a moment later, "which may surprise you, but I am certain that it exists. *There is a direct relation between color and sound here.* The light waves in certain combinations produce sound-waves."

The Harmony of Colors

"I can only explain what I mean by reference to the telephone. You know how, by a telephone, sounds are first transformed into electric vibrations and afterward reshaped into sonorous waves. You know also that we have used a ray of light to send telephonic messages, taking advantage of the sensitiveness of certain substances and their power of varying in electric resistance in accord with the intensity of the light that strikes them. Thus, with a telephone at each end, we can make a beam of light reproduce a human voice.

"What we have done, awkwardly and partially, by the aid of imperfect mechanical contrivances, Nature has accomplished here in a perfect way, by means of the peculiar composition of the air and some special construction of the auditory apparatus. It is all in line with the strange power of mental communication which these people possess.

"Light and sound, color and music, are linked for them in a manner that we cannot comprehend. Their esthetic enjoyment must be marvelously in advance of ours.

"It is plain to me now that the music of color which we saw at the palace was something far more complete and wonderful than we then imagined. Together with the pleasure which they derive from the harmonic combinations of shifting hues, they experience at the same time the delight that comes from sounds which are associated with and awakened by those colors, but are utterly inaudible to us.

"I believe that all of their senses are more completely and delicately developed than ours, and that even the perfume of these flowers is more delightful to Ala than to us."

"By Jove, Edmund," cried Jack, who had been listening with amazement, "it is indeed a divine world to which you have brought us! But I wish you would find a way to open up these delights to the rest of us. It's rather disappointing to be plunged into the midst of such things without being able to enjoy them."

His words thrilled me, for I knew that he never spoke thus without having a definite meaning behind.

"But see here," Jack continued. "I don't quite get hold of this thing. These people talk, you know. Then why don't they sing, and why don't they get their music the way we do?"

"Because," was the reply, "as I have just explained to you, they have a far higher and more delicate means of producing and receiving the harmonics of sound. They talk occasionally, it is true, just as you see that these birds utter low sounds from time to time, but speech with them has not been developed as with us, since they have not our need of it."

"I am rather surprised to find that they talk at all. I shouldn't wonder if their spoken language were simply a reflex of their written or printed language."

"Writing and printing!" I exclaimed. "Do you think that there are such things here?"

The Libraries on the Planet

"I HAVEN'T a doubt of it," Edmund replied. "So intellectual a people must have a history and a literature. But the order of development has been exactly the reverse of that with us. They have first invented their signs for recording thought, and then a simple spoken language has originated from those signs.

"As to their speaking, that is a thing inevitable. Every sentient being utters sounds. It is a necessary result of the experiencing of emotion, and I don't believe that there is anywhere in the universe a race of beings more delicately organized, in our emotional sense, than these inhabitants of Venus."

Inasmuch as I intend to publish a book dealing with the scientific aspect of life on Venus, I shall not burden this story of our adventures with these details, only saying now that it actually turned out as Edmund had conjectured.

We found later that not only were writing and printing known and practised, the characters much resembling that of the Chinese, but at the capital there were immense libraries, containing literary works and histories of Venus for hundreds of generations.

As soon as a comprehension of what Edmund had told us dawned fully upon our minds, we began to note more carefully the conduct of Ala, and we were quickly convinced of the substantial correctness of his inferences.

She sat on a flowery bank under the fragrant drooping branches, and seemed entranced by aerial music which we could not hear.

While we thus lingered, with strange thoughts throwing us into a dreamy mood, I happened to fix my eyes upon an opening in the foliage, directly behind Edmund, who had placed himself at Ala's side.

A curious gleam attracted my attention, and looking sharply, I recognized a pair of eyes intently watching us! Before I could open my lips or make a movement, the face to which the eyes belonged appeared for the fraction of a second and then was withdrawn.

It was the handsome, but evil, countenance of Ingra!

CHAPTER XVI.

Turning the Tables

FOR a moment I was too startled to be able to speak. Then, knowing the need of caution, I approached Edmund and whispered in his ears:

"We are entrapped. Ingra is behind you."

Edmund did not change countenance. He did not even alter the direction of his eyes.

"Hush," he whispered in return. "Make no sign, but be ready for an emergency. Go to Jack and Henry in an indifferent manner, and tell them what you have seen, but say that I am prepared this time, and that we shall not be caught; tell them to keep perfectly cool."

I did as Edmund directed. Jack showed no fear, but Henry was a little shaken. We stood fast, not knowing what it was best to do. I saw no more of Ingra, but I knew that he was there plotting mis-

chief, and no doubt with enough force at hand to overwhelm us.

I cursed the accident that had thrown us once more into his power. Without question he had come to this remote place to conceal himself while laying his plans, and fate had thrown us into his very lair!

Presently Edmund calmly rose and, taking Ala by the hand, indicated a wish to return to the car. I could see that his eyes furtively surveyed the thicket, although he hardly turned his head. I drew my pistol, and Jack imitated me.

"Stop that!" Edmund whispered sharply. "Keep them within reach, but don't use them except in an emergency, and not then without a sign from me."

Ala understood the situation, and her cheeks paled a little as she followed Edmund, shoving through the underbrush. The car was only four or five rods away, but our path to it was obstructed by the vegetation, and never in my life have I been more nervously apprehensive. I expected every second to feel a rough hand laid upon me. But, whatever Ingra's plans were, he did not attack us during the anxious minutes while we were pushing our way to the car.

Captured by Ingra

BUT, just as we were on the point of entering the open door, the blow fell. There was a rush, the branches parted, and Ingra, with more than a dozen followers, fell upon us. The onset was so sudden and fierce that we were swept away from the door, into a small, comparatively open space at the side of the car.

Since we were unable to enter the car, this was the best thing that could have happened, because it offered a little room to act together for defense.

Ingra's aids were all, like himself, tall and powerful, but they carried no weapons as far as I could see; not even bludgeons. Our pistols were in our pockets, and they remained there during the first few minutes of the breathless struggle. There were at last three men upon each of us, and they gave us no time for anything but the quickest kind of sparring.

In this we were all adepts; I have told you of Edmund's skill. Jack was an equally hard hitter, but, owing to his bulk and weight, not so quick. I was only second to Edmund in all-around work, and even Henry was better than the average in sparring, though somewhat lacking in strength.

The efforts of our assailants was to grip and hold us, and ours was to keep them off long enough to enable us to draw our weapons. A keen regret darted through my mind that Edmund had not permitted us to keep the pistols in our hands. Yet they might have been knocked out in the sudden rush before we could have used them.

Even in the midst of the desperate struggle, I saw that Edmund had leveled two of his assailants, and then I was tripped and down I went. What happened to the others during the half minute that I lay prostrate, with my foes atop of me, I do not know; but when I felt myself pulled into a sitting posture, with my arms held tightly behind, a strange sight confronted me.

It was a sight that surprised my captors as much as it did me.

Edmund was lying on the ground, his arms above his head, held by two of his assailants. Ingra was standing by him, leaning forward as if to strike, with a long, glittering knife in his hand—the first weapon I had seen among them—and Ala, who from the commencement of the fray I had not seen, knelt by Edmund's side, with one hand upon his shoulder and the other extended in a gesture of command toward Ingra.

The latter seemed frozen in his tracks.

The knife remained poised, his body was thrown forward on one leg, but his eyes met Ala's and quailed.

Pocahontas on Venus

SO dramatic a pose I have never seen on any stage. It was not the pleading look of Pocahontas saving Captain John Smith from his savage enemies that I saw in Ala's face, but the irresistible glance of an imperious will.

Kneeling though she was, her attitude and manner were those of a queen who knows only obedience. The whole force of her character was concentrated in her wonderful eyes. Not only Ingra, but his followers were arrested as if they had been hypnotized.

Not one of them made a motion. Jack and Henry were also prostrate and guarded, for we seemed all to have been overthrown almost at the same moment, but their captor, like mine, remained motionless and staring with amazed looks.

Evidently Ala was speaking, or had spoken, in that voiceless language, and her words, if I may so say, had a potency above all physical strength. But the thought flashed through my head that this spell could not endure.

The passion of Ingra was too fierce, his provocation was too intense, his own rank was too near that of the woman's to permit of his being effectually and permanently restrained by her interference. I expected, each instant, to see him dash aside the arm that Ala interposed, and finish his murderous stroke. The same thought must have occurred to Edmund, and he, at least, never lost the fraction of a second in acting upon the impulses of his mind.

The sudden staying of the unremitting attack had furnished the opportunity so long desired, and, with a motion as quick as thought, Edmund wrencheded his right hand free from the now unnerved assailant, who had held it above his head, and in another instant his pistol was aimed at Ingra's heart.

"Quick!" I yelled, imitating his act. "Your pistols!"

I got mine from my pocket, for the fellows, in their astonishment, had let go of me, and waiting for no further guidance from Edmund, I fired, without particular aim. The shot struck a tall chap at my feet, and down he went. The other who had held me gave back, and I sprang upon my feet.

The whole situation was changed in a twinkling. Jack freed himself as I had done, but without firing, and Henry's assailants retired from the muzzles of our pistols.

It was our turn now.

"Shall we shoot the dogs?" demanded Jack.

"No," Edmund replied. "Simply scare them off. But I'll keep this fellow, now that I have him."

A COLUMBUS of SPACE

~ By Garrett P. Serviss ~

Author of "The Moon Metal", "The Second Deluge", etc.



A minute earlier, we might have saved Edmond and Alia, but with their ways in the mind of the flame... Edmond now
met... He could feel heat and pressure in his veins, his heart racing in his chest, his mind racing upwards, as it commanding us to go.

What Went Before

THE hero of the story, Edmund Stoneyall, has discovered how to utilize atomic energy. He constructs a car that can traverse interplanetary space, activated by this energy, and with two friends starts on a trip to the planet Venus, not disclosing to them his intention at first. He reaches a rather desolate part of the planet, where daylight never appears, sees the almost ape-like inhabitants, cave-dwellers, who wish to sacrifice one of them to the gods, and they rescue the proposed victim only by killing the High Priest. They get in among the valleys in a mountain of ice, on the edge of the dark face of the planet, taking with them some of the cave-dwellers on sleds. The car with sleds fastened alongside and oil left one of the cave-dwellers upon them, is carried now along a sort of glacial stream, but soon sleds and the unfortunate occupants disappear, and our travellers are left with only one of the ape-like cave-dwellers, Juba, as company. Now they reach the

warm regions of Venus, where there is perpetual day, and there find a highly developed race who communicate with each other by a species of telepathy, and our travellers are enchanted by the beautiful appearance of the beings, who are superior in every way to terrestrial mankind.

As they fly, a terrible catastrophe is narrowly averted, Edmund shooting the steersman on a threatening aeroplane. A beautiful woman, Ala, the heroine of the story, saves them from the wrath of the mob by her influence; she and Edmund fall in love with each other. Edmund has a rival, Ingra, in his affections on Ala, and the plotting and deeds of Ingra are directed to getting rid of the earthly visitors. They explore the country, are threatened by a huge monster, and at last get into a true Eden on the planet. The story leaves them with Ingra and his party in the midst of an attack upon the earthly visitors and upon Ala's escort,

A COLUMBUS OF SPACE

By GARRETT P. SERVIESS]

Conclusion

An Escape

OUR assailants retreated into the bushes as we threatened them with the pistols, but Edmund would not allow Ingra to escape with the others. The fellow was completely armed, knowing the deadly power of our pistols, and he obeyed Edmund's commands with a dejected air, occasionally glancing at Ala, who disdained to return his look.

Edmund backed him into the open door of the car, and we all entered, after banishing the maid who, half scared to death, had concealed herself in the bushes. Then Edmund closed the door and turned to the machinery, leaving to us the care of guarding our prisoner.

The latter sat quietly enough on a bench, Jack on one side of him and I on the other, while Ala placed herself as far from him as she could get.

I wondered at the fellow's audacity. Surely no man in his senses would have thought of winning a woman's heart by violence, but evidently his passionate nature had overcome all scruples of reason, and as for conscience, he had none.

Ala's detestation of him was written on her every feature.

After we had got out of the wild tangle of branches, vines, and flowers, the car rose to a considerable elevation, and Edmund strode about to get his bearings. Then Ala went to his side.

Conversing together, they looked out of the windows, and she indicated the direction that we were

to pursue. First we darted high in the air, and then set off at a great rate. It now became evident at what a vast distance from the capital, and from the inhabited lands of Venus, we had landed in our wild descent from the cloud-domes.

But for Ala's topographical knowledge, we should have been long in finding the proper route.

Ingra a Prisoner

THE way once pointed out, however, we never swerved aside, and Edmund worked up the speed to as high a point as he deemed safe in that dense atmosphere, which seemed to flow in translucent waves about the sides of the rushing car. At last I asked Edmund what he intended to do with the prisoner.

"I'll put him behind bars," he replied grimly, "if I have to construct them myself."

Notwithstanding our great speed, the journey was a long one. We kept at an elevation of several miles, in order to command a wide view, and the scene was magnificent. The wilderness we were leaving behind was in a tropical zone, on the borders of that savage region where we had encountered the amurion monster, and a vast roll of strangely glowing clouds lay upon the far horizon.

But beneath us the country continually improved in aspect, signs of cultivation making their appearance, until at length we began to pass over villages, and then over small cities, each of which, in inimitable

In the concluding chapter of this charming futuristic tale, we find our heroes beset by many new and extraordinary dangers. There is hardly a page of the preceding chapters in which excitement does not run high. We are not going to tell you the end of the story, because we do not wish to spoil it for you.

As in the previous instalments, Professor Garrett P. Serviss has given an accurate scientific analysis of what may be found on Venus should the planet ever be explored.

AMAZING STORIES

tion of the metropolis, had its little group of aerial towers, with fluttering banners. Occasionally we saw a few airships at a distance, travelling in various directions, and these became more numerous as we approached the capital.

Our approach was not unnoticed, and a crowd of planes and airships came to meet and escort us as we drew near. Our reception at the principal landing of the great tower was most joyous.

Back to the City

THE aerial part of the city seemed suddenly to warm with inhabitants, and the air was filled with excited excursionists rushing together from all sides.

On approaching the landing-stage, I saw a throng of brilliantly dressed people and officials awaiting us with welcoming smiles and gestures, and among them, to my great pleasure, I noticed Juba, standing in the foremost rank, treated with evident respect, and showing every sign of joy on his broad, hairy face. We had been absent not more than twenty-four hours, but we were greeted as warmly as if our stay had been a year.

No sooner was the car well over the landing than Edmund brought it to rest upon the broad platform, and threw open the door. Jack and Henry were the first to alight. The maid followed them, and I came next.

Edmund lingered a moment to secure something in the mechanism, and Alia stayed near him while Ingra was behind them.

During the trip I had not liked Ingra's conduct; though, I confess, I do not know exactly how he could have pleased me in his bearing. But, at any rate, I felt an indefinite sense of anxiety whenever I glanced at him. He remained all the while in moody silence, occasionally looking at Alia in a way I did not fancy, but most of the time fixing his eyes covertly upon Edmund, whose every movement he watched as he manipulated the controllers.

Somehow, he impressed me with the idea that he was planning a stroke against us, and when I stepped from the car my anxiety suddenly dashed into a vivid apprehension of evil, and I could not resist turning back and saying to Edmund:

"Look out for Ingra, Edmund. He means no good."

"Don't worry. I'll take care of him," Edmund replied, glancing with a smile over his shoulder as he tightened a little hand-wheel.

A moment later Edmund approached the door, beckoned to Alia to follow. I saw now that he intended to leave Ingra in the car until he could explain the situation, and provide for his incarceration.

What followed was like a lightning-stroke,

The Car Is Lost

I SAW Edmund pitch forward, propelled from the car-door as if he had been shot out, and an instant afterward the door was slammed to, and I heard the bars fall into place.

Edmund recovered himself in a moment, and together we sprang at the closed door and threw ourselves against it. Of course, we made no impression. Edmund's face was as pale as a sheet.

"Quick—for Heaven's sake!" he cried. "Get

something! Get me a bar! I must break it somehow. This is awful! Alia—inside! Can nobody get me a bar of steel?"

The crowd prattled round us, without comprehending what was going on. Nobody except ourselves knew that Ingra was in the car. Edmund ran to one of the windows, but even as he reached it the steel shutter was closed with a bang from within, and we heard the bolts shoot into their sockets.

It was the only time in my acquaintance with him that I ever saw Edmund Signewall for an instant lose his wits. He seemed not to know what to do.

His face was dreadful to look upon. He pounded with his fists upon the steel walls of the car until his knuckles reddened.

As for the rest of us, we knew no more than he what to do. The excitement spread to the crowd, and they pressed upon us with wondering looks and exclamations.

A minute or two passed in this helpless agitation, and then the car gave a lurch, and a second later it rose from the platform!

Edmund cried out in helpless, passionate fear.

In a moment the car was a yard above the platform, and gathering speed. I felt my heart sink. Edmund became, if possible, paler than before.

"Hold it! Hold it!" he shouted, and with him I tried to grasp the smooth, polished walls that slipped away from our hands.

At this moment there was a rush in the crowd. People were flung aside, and to my amazement, as the car rose in the air, I saw Juba make a mighty leap, seize the steel grating covering one of the windows, and soar away with the machine like a huge baboon hanging on the outside of a cage.

Then the car shot toward the sky!

CHAPTER XVII

To the Rescue

A LOW exclamation, magnified by the multitude of strange voices into a mighty murmur, rose from the crowd, and every eye followed the retreating car.

In this emergency all of Edmund's sagacity and self-command instantly came back. He was once more the cool, resourceful master of the situation.

"An aeroplane?" he shouted, and at the word sprang toward one of the floating machines beside the landing.

Bringing aside the engineer, in a moment he had the machine in control. Jack and I were upon his heels, but Henry was not quick enough, and was left behind. There were only four or five men, the crew of the plane, on the craft.

With a skill and rapidity that astonished me, well as I knew his capacity, Edmund swung the huge machine round and, with reckless disregard of consequences, set the driving-screws whirling at their highest speed. The great tower seemed to melt away behind us, so quickly did we leave it.

But it was a mad chase.

A Race Begins

WHAT could this air-driven craft do against the car impelled by the mysterious interatomic forces? Already the latter was rapidly diminishing

with distance. Still, we could see Juba clinging to the window-grating, although at every instant I expected him to fall.

But Edmund would not despair. His eyes shone as he drove the machinery of the plans to its utmost limit. The crew were stupefied, and offered no opposition.

"We must not lose sight of them," said Edmund, his self-control becoming more perfect as the minutes passed. "We must never lose sight of them for an instant."

"But surely," I exclaimed, "you cannot hope to overtake them?"

"Yes," he said almost fiercely, "I hope even that! Remember," he added more coolly, "that Ingra really knows nothing of the management of the controllers. He has watched me operate them long enough to know how to start the car; unless Heaven is against us, he will not be able to work it up to its best speed, and he can hardly direct it with certainty. At any moment he may find himself descending. Heaven grant that they do not come down with a rush."

"But there is Aia," I said. "She knows how to manage the machinery. Perhaps he will be compelled to entrust it to her."

Edmund ground his teeth in rage at my words. "Yes, Aia is there, a prisoner!"

"And Juba," I added.

"But how long can he remain on that fearful perch? And what can be done?"

"If they are aware of his presence," I suggested, "perhaps Aia may find a way to communicate with him, and aid him in his efforts."

The idea seemed to strike Edmund, and he joyfully replied:

"Yes, yes, surely she will find a way. She is a great woman—a woman to trust in an emergency. What a brave act that was of Joba's! Who could have dreamed that under his shaggy exterior there was a heart of gold, and so quick a brain?"

"He was the head blacksmith in the cavern," said Jack. "If there is any way to get into that car, he will find it."

"It can only be done by aid from within," replied Edmund. "But I trust to Aia. She will find a way."

"They cannot but be aware that Joba is on the car," I said. "They must surely hear him, and his mere presence will have its effect."

"If Ingra does not contrive to throw him off," suggested Jack,

"He cannot get at him," was Edmund's reply. "If only he doesn't lose his breath with the swift motion, and if his strength holds out, all may be well. But we must keep them in sight. It is our only chance, and theirs."

The car was now so far away that it looked very small; but, being thrown in silhouette against the softly glowing cloud-dome—for it was at a greater elevation than ours—we could still, with the aid of a glass, clearly see Juba clinging to the outside.

It was a comfort to know that he was yet able to retain his perch. If he could stay there to the end, he might be of estimable service when the crisis should arrive.

The Question of Elevation

AT first I was somewhat surprised that Edmund kept at so low an elevation compared with that of the fleeing car. We were not more than a half-mile above the ground, while the object of our pursuit was at least three miles high. But in a little while it became obvious that the course which Edmund had adopted was a very wise one. In the first place, by keeping at a low elevation we could always see the car projected against the bright sky, and there was thus less danger of its escaping us.

In the next place, as Edmund pointed out, when the car came down, as it must do some time, we could cut in under it, so to speak, and approach the landing-point along a base-line shorter than the diagonal that the car would have to pursue.

"The higher he goes," said Edmund, "the greater our advantage will be. Fortunately, he seems to be rising all the time. There is no danger that he will run away in that direction."

"He has no conception of anything above the cloud-dome, and his only object is to get as far away as possible, in order to defy pursuit before landing. I expect every moment, now, to see him begin to descend."

"But are you sure that he can manipulate the controllers well enough to make a safe descent?" I asked.

"Let me pray that he can," replied Edmund. "I will give him credit for great intelligence. If he did not possess extraordinary capacity, he would never have learned, simply by watching me, how to run the machinery."

"The fact that he could penetrate so far gives me hope, that he has learned enough to insure their safety. The high-speed controllers, used when astride the atmosphere, are in a different location from the others, and are manipulated somewhat differently.

"I did not touch them during our journey, so that I have little fear that he will discover their use. It is now evident that we can at least keep the car in sight."

"The resistance of this dense atmosphere is a serious obstacle to a machine which, unlike the plane, does not derive an advantage from that very circumstance."

An Alarm

WE were now many miles from the capital, and trawling toward the tropical belt. It was evident that Ingra intended to take refuge again in the wilderness, though at a point far distant from the place where we had so recently encountered him.

"Aia has told me," said Edmund, "that Ingra, who is very fond of wild sports, and who until our arrival seems to have exhibited no evil characteristics, has a number of hunting-lodges in this vast wilderness, and it was due to the unlucky fate that guided us in our descent that we fell into his hands."

For, unknowingly, we came down within a half-mile of one of his lodges. He always has a retinue in attendance at his lodges, and probably he is now making for one of these places."

"Do you think they are aware that we are following?"

"Of course, they will expect to be pursued, but

AMAZING STORIES

I am in hopes that Ingra has not seen us, and does not know that we have kept within eyesight. You remember that the car has no window in the rear—a mistake of construction which until now I have regretted. It has not swerved from its course since starting, and I have been careful to keep directly behind it.

"Consequently, there is every reason to think that Ingra, trusting to the speed of the car, has not even taken the trouble to look behind. Besides, we have kept comparatively close to the ground, where it is not easy to see us from a distance, and the moment I perceive the car beginning to descend I shall run down to the very tree-tops in order to be the better concealed."

Our hopes now rose high. We had demonstrated our ability to keep the car in view, though, to be sure, it had become little more than a dark speck in the sky, and its steady motion relieved our anxiety concerning a possible disaster from Ingra's inability to manage it.

Several hours passed, and once more we had left the inhabited lands behind and were passing over the border of the wilderness, where the luxuriance of the vegetation surpassed that of the Amazonian forests of the wilds of Borneo.

Suddenly, Edmund uttered an exclamation.

"Great Heavens!" he cried. "Look! Something is wrong. It is all to end in disaster at last!"

Fear of Losing the Car

JACK and I, startled by Edmund's agitation, glanced at the distant car. It was falling from the sky!

It shot hither and thither, sweeping in long descending curves, and darting to one side and another, like a collapsed balloon.

"What can have happened?" I exclaimed. "Good Heavens! If John should be flung off now, our only ally would be lost."

"No; we have another," said Edmund quietly, all his self-mastery assuring itself—"John, himself."

"Look," he continued, a moment afterward, "the car right itself. It will come down all right."

It was so. The eccentric movements ceased, and we saw the car descending rapidly, but with a steady motion which indicated that it was again under control. During the ten minutes that the wild tumble lasted, it had fallen within half a mile of the ground, and now it was gliding swiftly away from us, over the top of the great forest.

Edmund strove to increase our speed, making the silent engineer and his men aid him with their utmost exertions. Glancing behind, I now noticed, for the first time, that several airplanes were pursuing us; but they were far behind.

They had probably started in pursuit as soon as possible after our chase began, but we had been so absorbed in watching the car that we had not even thought of looking behind. We had trusted entirely to ourselves but now I felt a satisfaction in knowing that we should have assistance in an emergency.

I called Edmund's attention to our pursuers, but he gave no heed. His whole mind and soul were fixed upon the car. In a little while it had descended so low that it became necessary for us to rise, in order to keep it in view.

Nevertheless, as Edmund had foreseen, our course, lying so near the ground, had given us a certain advantage, and we had drawn perceptibly nearer while running for the point toward which the car was descending. Still, it now became very difficult to keep the object of our pursuit in view.

At times we lost sight of it entirely against the dark background of foliage. But an occasional gleam from the polished sides of the car enabled us to retain a general notion of its location.

A Battle

AT last it dropped into the great sea of vegetation, and was completely lost. At this time we were apparently, about three miles behind it. "Keep your eyes fixed on the point where it disappeared," said Edmund. "Don't let your sight waver. I shall make straight for the place."

Fortunes favored us, for at the spot where the car had sunk from sight a group of enormous trees had lifted their mighty tops high above the general surface of the forest, and this landmark was invaluable to us.

When we had run within an eighth of a mile of these trees, Edmund at last showed up, and got the airplane under perfect control.

We crept silently above the tree-tops, every eye fixed upon the spot where we expected at any moment to see the car.

Suddenly a forest glade appeared, shadowed by the very trees that had served as our guides, and there was the car resting upon the ground! The door was toward us, and open.

In it stood John, looking with a horrified countenance upon a spectacle that might well have frozen her blood.

Ingra and John were engaged in a terrific battle. At one moment they rolled upon the ground, locked together, looking like a man and a wild beast at death-grips.

Each was ferociously exerting his utmost strength. Now one, now the other, was on top.

Each endeavoring to throttle the other, they revolved so rapidly that the eye could hardly follow the successive phases of the struggle.

Suddenly they rolled against a rock, and the shock releasing their hold, both leaped to their feet. But neither flinched, nor gave back.

They sprang together again with demoniac fury, John's huge eyes blazing out of the wild tangle of his hair, while his huge, shaggy arms resembled those of a bear rushing madly to the death-kang.

But Ingra was a foe worthy to encounter so formidable an antagonist. With amazing strength and agility, he hurled his assailant backward, and then, to my horror, I saw that he had his long knife in his hand, while John had no weapon.

John a Fighter

LOWERING his form as he sped to the onset, and with a wicked laugh, Ingra darted upon his foe. For an instant I thought that the blade had reached the vitals of his antagonist, for John staggered backward, but a second later Ingra shot away as if the walking-beam of an en-

Juba had struck him, and fell, stunned and motionless.

Juba's mighty fist had been propelled against his chest, for, like a Frenchman, the creature fought with arms and legs alike.

"Now you have him!" shouted Jack, dancing with excitement, as Edmund swept the airplane toward the spot. "Pin him down! Don't let him up!"

Juba sprang at his foe, but the latter had been driven so far away by the terrible blow that before Juba could seize him he had recovered, and was on his feet again.

"Don't let him get away," cried Edmund, leaping from the airplane as it touched the ground, and rushing, with Jack and me on his heels, to the scene of the encounter.

But Ingra was too quick.

Seeing his enemies swarming, he turned and ran with the speed of a deer.

In a second he had disappeared in the undergrowth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We Find Another Enemy

AFTER struggling and stumbling through the thicket for a few minutes, we gave up the chase sooner than we should have done on account of Edmund's anxiety to return to Ala, who had remained where we first saw her, standing in the door of the car.

When he stopped, we all stopped; though Juba, whose blood was up, would have continued the pursuit if he had not been compelled to desist. He disregarded the rest of us, but obeyed Edmund's call like a faithful hound.

It was a great disappointment that Ingra had escaped, but there was no help for it. We must face the consequences, and probably there was not one of us who did not feel an unuttered foreboding of disaster. We had made for ourselves a terrible enemy, and it was perfectly certain that as long as we remained he would pursue us with all the energy of his fiercely passionate nature and the resources of his acute mind.

Edmund expressed this when he exclaimed, on our hurried return to the car:

"That fellow and I cannot both live in this world. He will not let me alone, but I will never run from him."

"Then why don't you get out of his world?" said Jack, who sometimes expressed rather bluntly his evidently conceived notion of right and justice. "You are the interloper, not he."

"Am I an interloper?" replied Edmund, with flashing eye and flushed cheek, "when she"—pointing to Ala, who, having heard of our approach, came joyously to meet us—"calls upon me to defend her?"

Jack made no reply, but whispered in my ear: "Jesus! I don't blame him. I'd die fighting for her myself."

Ala Once More

ALA'S beauty seemed tenfold greater in the flush of excitement that overspread her features. She greeted us with hardly less warmth than she

bestowed upon Edmund, and the caressing touch of her hand on Juba's hairy arm was a reward that the poor fellow plainly accepted in full compensation for the fearful risk he had run. And he deserved her thanks because, but for his presence, Ingra would have abduct Ala as soon as the car landed, and we should have arrived too late.

We had hardly reached the car again when one of the pursuing planes came up, and chose after it followed several more. They brought a number of court officials and attendants, who were quite in the dark as to the meaning of this extraordinary escapade. For, it will be remembered, there had been no time to tell anybody of the presence of Ingra in the car when we arrived at the tower.

Ala explained the situation, and the excitement of her friends was laughable. They ran about in the underbrush, anxious to show their devotion, and possibly thinking that they would find the fugitive concealed close at hand.

But Ala recalled them; and, as more planes arrived, organized the search with a rapidity that increased my respect for her ability. There was one remarkable feature in her intercourse with her people that struck me with great force.

She was a queen, and she had the look and bearing of one when she chose to assert her authority; but there was no appearance of serenity in the manner of those surrounding her, and she demanded none. If ever there was a democratic Queen, it was she. Everybody recognized her rank, but it was rather with evidences of admiration and love than of mere submission.

In a few minutes she had arranged her plan. Airplanes were sent scouring over the forest in all directions with orders to search every nook where Ingra might be in hiding. Then she turned to Edmund, and they communed together for a time, while we awaited the result of their consultation.

The decision, apparently somewhat against, Edmund's opinion, for he wished to aid in the search, was to return at once to the capital. Accordingly, we embarked in the car; and were soon speeding away from the wilderness, leaving a dozen of the planes to prosecute the search.

After our return to the capital a very different series of events began to occupy our attention.

Of Ingra we heard no more, for the present. One by one the air planes that had been left to hunt him down returned unsuccessful.

It was certain that he had adherents in the city, as he had elsewhere, for his family was very old and powerful, and had always occupied an exalted position; but still we saw nothing to alarm us. Nevertheless, we never doubted that he was simply biding his time and planning his vengeance.

To me the thought became an obsession, and sometimes I could hardly sleep on account of it. It was horrible to think of our being practically alone here in this distant world, among a people who knew nothing of our ways, and who treated us with respect only because in the first place we excited their curiosity, and in the second place because Ala's favor was our shield.

But I could not get away from the fear that when the novelty should be over the romantic attachment which their queen had formed for Edmund would cease to captivate the public's fancy, and then the scales would incline against us. Whenever I broached the subject to Edmund, however, he pretended to treat my fears as purely imaginary.

Jack's Tale of His Troubles

JACK, always impressionable and erratic, quickly lost himself in the delights of life in the brilliant capital, and could not be brought to think of the future. To Henry I dared not open my mind, for he was already only too much disposed to brood and to take the dark view of everything. If he had known my doubts he would have driven me mad by magnifying them.

For a while he tormented me with complaints and begged to be taken back to the earth, until Edmund turned upon him in such a fury that he never again ventured to open his lips on the subject.

In the meantime it was delightful to watch the gracious manner in which Alia sought to distract us.

She began by exhibiting the marvels of the capital. Thus far we had only seen the great throne-room, the hall of justice, and one or two smaller apartments in the palace.

Now she conducted us through halls and rooms more splendid than I could have imagined to exist. The golden decorations were beyond belief in their richness. In the astonishing quantity of the precious metal lavished upon them, and in the delicacy and beauty of the forms.

Nothing interested Henry so much as this. It stirred his curiosity, which I must confess, although I liked him, was a prominent defect of his character.

"What a place for a Pizarro!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Edmund, "but there is no springing Atahualpa here. You need not dream of carrying off any of this wealth."

"But you seem to be in a fair way of falling heir to it," put in Jack with a laugh.

Edmund colored, but did not reply.

"For shame, Jack," I said. "Can't you remember that if Alia does not understand our language, she has a marvelous power of reading our thoughts?"

"That's so," said Jack. "Upon my word I feel rather uncomfortable in this world where a man's mind goes naked."

"Why, a little while ago I was strongly tempted to steal a kiss from a pretty maid who was showing me a wonderful affair of gold and jewels. I don't know whether it was an idol or what, and upon my word, before I could have made a motion—and, of course, I didn't really mean to—she darted away from me as if she had been stung, and her winning smile was changed for a black look that made me hang my head."

After this we all became a little more circumspect in our comments, and tried to keep our thoughts to ourselves, unless, as was generally the case, they were such as our entertainers could only find pleasure in knowing.

A Wonderful City

I should have to write a book to tell you about all the surprising things that Alia showed us in the palace, and in the city—for we made a tour of that also.

The streets were wonderful, crooked as cow-paths, crowded with people, magnificent with shops filled with all sorts of curious objects, and bordered with thousands of aerial structures that towered up and up, glittering like a Jack Frost paradise at Christmas; while at all elevations air ships and airplanes passed and repassed, steering clear of one another with the grace and ease of Venetian gondoliers.

She took us through a great library, where we saw the printed books to which I have referred; but there was nothing to compare in strangeness with the visit which we finally made to a kind of temple, where we saw the most remarkable character in Venus, the "Head Medicine Man," as Jack facetiously dubbed him.

But we couldn't remain long in a facetious mood when in the presence of this personage. And, besides, he gave us a shock, the full nature of which I did not comprehend until long afterward, when it came upon me with overwhelming force.

Jack's title for him may have been sufficiently descriptive of his functions. He seemed to be a kind of masslike pythoness, and his gloomy, cavernous apartment in the center of the temple, strangely lighted with huge, dull-red electric globes, was apparently a Delphic shrine for the people of Venus.

The High Priest

IT WAS our first introduction to any thing resembling superstition among these people, and to me, at least, it came as a great surprise, for in this world of light, beauty, and harmony, such a thing seemed strikingly out of place. The evident awe with which Alia regarded this high priest of mystery dismisseed me also.

Contrary to what one might expect, this man, who was of extraordinary stature, I should say nearly seven feet tall, showed no signs of age. He seemed to be in middle life, and very vigorous; and, as he sat on a kind of throne of some block, highly polished metal, with his elbow resting on a short pillar capped with a circlet of red jewels that blazed like living coals, his huge head and strong face were marvelously impressive.

I never saw such a face anywhere else. It was beardless, and as white as marble. Usually he allowed only his profile to be seen; and one could not look upon it without a creeping of the nerves. His nose was immense, resembling a great curved beak, and his deep-set eyes, roofed with projecting brows, were as black as jet, but curiously luminous as they gleamed sideways out of their pink-house.

But when he turned his full face, even Edmund started back. He seemed to project his countenance toward us like a monstrous bird stretching out his neck, and his glowing eyes appeared to penetrate our innermost thoughts.

This lasted only for a moment; and then he turned his profile again and remained motionless.

Alia then had a long communication with Edmund, at the end of which he turned to us and said:

"This is the most remarkable thing that we have yet encountered. It seems that this is the center of their religious system, and that strange man is its head. It is, as far as I can make out, based upon a kind of sun-worship."

The Sun and Venus

"At rare intervals the cloud-dome opens over-head in a narrow rift, through which the sun appears for a few moments, as a vast, blinding ball of fire; larger and brighter, of course, than we ever see it from the earth. Sometimes a whole generation passes without this momentary opening of the heavens."

"Ala herself has never seen the vision of the bright god of the sky; but, like all her people, she regards it as a manifestation of a higher governing power, and every time that the phenomenon occurs there is an extraordinary outburst of enthusiasm, which arrests all other affairs, and the whole planet is swept by a wave of religious frenzy."

"This high priest is regarded as the mortal representative of the power above. Upon his death another, chosen by what I suppose may be called a council of augurs, takes his place. He has all the sacredness and influence of a Delphic oracle, and his utterances are considered as sure prophecies of future events."

"I'd never come to Aila for a fortune," broke in Jack. "I don't like his looks."

"Hush! But that's just what you have come for," replied Edmund with a smile. "And I don't know how the thing is going to work out for us. Ala has brought us here to learn this priest's opinion—well, about me. You will understand. If he proves unpropitious, it won't be well. I hope for a favorable oracle."

This put an entirely new complexion upon the affair, and I began to regard the occupant of the black throne with an apprehension that I had not felt before. I could have wished our fate to lie in anybody's hands but his. I quite agreed with Jack on that point.

I wondered why Ala had not consulted this authority earlier, if she did not feel free to make her own choice and act her own will. Now that we, through Edmund, were so deeply involved, the consequences could not but be very serious if another adverse influence besides that of Ingra was directed against us.

But I suppose the girl queen had simply followed the dictates of her heart at first, and then events had so crowded upon one another that there was no opportunity to take counsel.

We were not compelled to wait long to discover the trend of the oracle. The beaked face and the jetty eyes were turned upon us again, and without warning the gigantic form rose to its full height. One arm was thrown out toward us in a gesture of repulsion, while the eyes blazed from the out-thrust colorless countenance so fiercely that, in spite of all my efforts at self-command, I absolutely quailed before them.

Henry started back, and would have fled instinctively if Edmund had not seized his arm and detained him. Juba alone, to my surprise, remained totally unmoved. Either he did not understand, or

else he had unwavering confidence in us, and so feared nothing.

Als Defiant

Als, for a moment, was overwhelmed with seeming disappointment and sorrow. Then she slowly raised her head, her cheeks reddened, her eyes shone with a determined look, and, meeting the glances of the great priest unflinchingly, she laid her hand on Edmund's shoulder. I saw a mingled look of pride, love, and defiance pass over Edmund's features; and then he faced the new enemy he had found with a firm glance.

"Now we are in for it," whispered Jack. "If Edmund pulls us out of this, I'll swear by him forever."

But the immediate consequences were not so serious—at least, in appearance—as our fears had anticipated.

The priest, from his towering elevation, glanced scornfully at Als; and then, in a low, monotonous tone, began a kind of chant. Only Als, of course, understood him; but, as she listened, an expression of growing horror came over her face. The scene lasted only two or three minutes. When the chant was finished, the oracular speaker slowly sank back upon his throne and turned away his face, which had become once more as impasive as marble.

Als could hardly remain upright. She leaned on Edmund's arm, and, as I thought, sobbed.

Suddenly she straightened. The querulous look and manner returned. Her white bearing and expression denoted resistance and resolution. Turning her back upon the black throne, without another glance at its occupant, but with a look at Edmund—in which her innocent soul shone forth in a way that there was no mistaking—she led us from the chamber.

The Priest's Prophecy

WHEN we were alone afterward in an apartment in the palace, Edmund told us the meaning of what had occurred.

"That the decision was adverse," he said, "I need not tell you. We have got the religious head of the planet against us now. But his sealing speech, which Als has explained to me as best she can, was a queer medley—a sort of prophetic vision, it would seem—which greatly affects Als, though for my part I only laugh at it."

"But what was it?" urged Jack.

"Oh," said Edmund, "only a crazy Mother Shipton jumble of nonsense. He talked about a grand conflagration and a general wiping out of things and persons that he doesn't like. I snap my fingers at his divination, but without any sensible magic he can do us a lot of harm. If I could persuade Als to go, I'd quit Venus within twenty-four hours. But I don't believe she'd consent to go, and I won't leave her, so that's the end of it."

Henry groaned in spirit, but Jack showed no white feather, and I don't believe I did either.

"Bully for you, Edmund!" Jack cried. "Go on and win. We'll stand by you, if we never see old New York again."

Edmund smiled with gratification, and grasped us each warmly by the hand.

CHAPTER XIX

An Extraordinary Hunt

THE significance of what had occurred in the temple gradually dawned upon me afterward, but it was never so clear in my mind as to produce more than an uneasy and growing foreboding.

Edmund did not mention the subject again, and there was no outward manifestation of the new opposition which had been set up against us. Naturally, it would require time to develop its force. It was a struggle between two opponents of equal power, for if the "Big Medicine Man," as Jack continued to call him, was supreme in religious affairs, Als was nevertheless queen, and her popularity was a bulwark to her authority.

Besides, so far as we knew, the affair was a secret known only to the persons immediately concerned. There had been no witnesses of the scene before the black thrones.

In the meantime, Als showed as little anxiety as Edmund. She was almost continually with us, and the time glided away very pleasantly with the entertainments which she was constantly providing for our amusement.

Color Music

OUR attention was now once more turned to the mystery of the color music. It was perfectly clear, after what we had learned in the wilderness, that the play of colors which had so astonished us furnished but a part of the esthetic enjoyment of these people.

Frequently there were what I may call concussions in the palace, and on these occasions I became convinced that more than half of the effect produced by the dramatic harmonies that gushed in glowing waves of color from the great circles on the walls was due to the production of sounds inaudible to us.

Edmund, as I had anticipated, that he would do from his remark in reply to Jack's enthusiastic demand when the secret of the singing birds first burst upon us, attacked the problem by rendering this strange music audible to us. And he succeeded, as he always succeeded.

How he did it I cannot pretend to explain, but he said that it was as simple in principle as a telephone. After many experiments he constructed three little boxes, one for each of us, and when we had attached them over our ears we could actually hear the sounds produced by the colored undulations.

I can never describe these sounds. They thrilled the very soul. They had a strange aerial quality, as if they were the voices of spirits floating in the air about us. The music that they produced reminded me, by the sweetness of its melodies, of an Aeolian harp; but it was more measured, and infinitely more varied. Listening to it, we felt stirred to depths of our being of whose existence we had not dreamed.

We were exalted, and something beyond human capacities of enjoyment seemed to have been given to us. Yet Edmund said that the exquisite pleasure we were enabled to experience by the aid of his contrivances was only a rude, imperfect, mechanical reproduction of that which was enjoyed by the people of Venus. But we were grateful to him for

affording us this glimpse into the possibilities of a transcendent development of the physical senses.

"It is the nature of Venus," Edmund declared. "This world so near the sun receives from the great orb richer gifts than come to the earth. The atmosphere here is tremendous with vibrations originating in the sun, which impart a character to the physical organization of the inhabitants of this planet which we can hardly imagine. Their joys are at the same time more delicate and more intense than ours."

An Exploring Party

WE were never tired of tasting the new pleasure that had been partially placed before us, but Edmund's restless spirit soon drew us away into fresh adventures.

He was determined to explore the torrid circle. He had learned from Als that no one had ever been able to penetrate beyond the place where Ingra had left us to be devoured by the monsters of the great swamps; but with his car he believed that we could go wherever he chose, and he persuaded Als, whose desire for knowledge and love of adventure were not less than his, to consent to a most extraordinary expedition.

In the preparations for this I believe that we all forgot the new danger that threatened us since the opposition of the Great Oracle had been declared.

Whatever might be the form that danger was to assume, it kept itself in the background and worked in secret. I had an uneasy feeling that in some manner Ingra would associate himself with it.

While the people, and even the high officials in the palace, apparently knew nothing of what had occurred, I felt certain that our arch-enemy would learn of it and remorselessly pursue the advantage that it gave him.

Again and again I was on the point of urging Edmund to leave the planet while there was yet time and take Als with us, if she would consent to go, as he had himself suggested. He was as absorbed in his schemes, however, that I hesitated to disturb his thoughts.

In a short time all our preparations were made, and we set out on what I must regard as the wildest and most inconsiderate adventure that we had yet undertaken.

We started, as usual, from the great tower of the palace, our company consisting of eight persons, all that the car could conveniently accommodate. These comprised, beside ourselves, Als, Juba, two maid-servants chosen from Als's immediate attendants, and a high official of the palace—a sort of majordomo—a very intelligent person and of great physical strength.

Of course we had our weapons, both the pistols and the guns, with an abundance of ammunition and of provisions. We were attended by half a dozen airships, which were to accompany us as far as they could go, and were there to await our return from the unknown region.

The Wonders of Venus

WE took the direction of the mines; and beyond them we entered the wilderness, and soon found ourselves involved in the zone of clouds and semi-darkness. Here, at a point where a curiously shaped mountain peak, rising just on the border of

the twilight-land and pointing its bold outlines against the strongly illuminated sky behind, served as a landmark which we could not miss on our return, the airplanes were ordered to await us, and we pushed on alone with the car.

Jack, of course, was all alive for this adventure, as he always was for anything promising excitement; but Henry didn't like it, and would have stayed behind if he had had the courage to remain alone among strangers. For my part, my curiosity was greatly aroused; and, besides I found immense interest in watching the enthusiasm of Alia.

Her adventurous spirit was in its element; and, as far as appearances went, she gave no thought to future troubles. According to custom, the control of things at the capital had been left in charge of a sort of board of regency, which was a permanent institution, as I learned, Alia not being the first queen who was fond of visiting distant parts of the country, though she was the first who had shown a disposition to explore unknown regions.

On leaving the airplanes behind, we plunged deeper and deeper into gloom, and were compelled to use our electric lights. Among Edmund's special preparations was a small search-light, placed at the peep-hole in the front end of the car, and this was now brought into requisition.

It gave us startling views of the nature of the surface beneath.

First we ran for many miles above an area covered with vast swamps and bogs, with the oddest conceivable shapes of vegetation. We were keen to see some of the gigantic animals which we knew, from our first startling experience, inhabited this region, and it was not long before the light found one out.

We were about a hundred feet above the ground, and proceeding slowly, when Edmund, who had placed himself beside the search-light and was peering through the opening, said quietly:

"There! Would you like to take a look?"

Alia was beside him in a moment, and she could not repress an exclamation, or refrain from starting backward, although in a second she recovered and laughed at her own nervousness. There was room for only one, beside Edmund, at the little window, and when Alia had satisfied her curiosity we each took our turn.

When mine came I was for an instant almost as much agitated as Alia had been.

A Strange Monster

DIRECTLY ahead of us, not more than seventy-five yards distant, there was a shallow pond, its banks thick with tangled bushes, and in the midst of it stood a monster on eight legs, tawny-colored in the electric light, seeming to bristle with stiff hairs all over its huge round body. Its head was relatively small, black, and apparently armored with polished jet, and fringed with innumerable eyes, which flamed in the brilliant beam poured upon them.

"Good Lord!" I could not but exclaim. "It is like a prodigious tarantula! Look! It is going to leap at us!"

"Upon my word," said Edmund, "I think the fellow does mean fight. Get away a moment, and I'll

swing the car round. We'll give him a broadside if he becomes too ugly."

Accordingly, the car was swung into such a position that one of the side windows faced the creature, and Edmund brought the movable search-light to the window, which he threw wide open.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried Henry. "Don't do that. He'll get at us."

"Don't be alarmed," Edmund replied, "He can do us no harm. We are two hundred feet away."

All of us crowded about the window, and it is unnecessary to say that the automatic guns were in our hands and the pistols ready.

During the few seconds that the streaming light had been removed the monster had changed his position; and now, as the glare fell upon him again, we were startled to find that he had approached us. He was within forty feet of the car, standing in a grassy glade, having with inconceivable rapidity and agility clambered or leaped over the stunted trees and bushes surrounding the pond in which we had first seen him.

His huge spiky body seemed to bristle with anger, and his countless eyes blazed like so many great rubies in the piercing light. It was truly a heart-quaking sight!

Alia started back with a womanly cry of alarm; and Henry, I am almost ashamed to say, sank helpless upon a bench.

"I believe he is going to jump at us," said Edmund quietly. "Aim for his head, and let him have half a dozen shots in quick succession."

Jack's Narrow Escape

BEFORE anybody could touch a trigger the awful creature bounded with lightning speed upon the car.

If you have ever seen a "hunting-spider" leap upon a fly, you know the incredible rapidity of its spring and its stroke. This monster was no less swift in his action.

Through sheer nervous shock we simultaneously discharged our guns; but without aim, and, unfortunately, without effect.

The monster struck the car with a force that made it roll back, and two shaggy legs entered the window.

A yell of horror and terror broke from Jack's lips, and in an instant he was dragged from the window, our terrible assailant dropping out of sight at the same moment!

Edmund sprang to the controllers, and the car sank swiftly to the ground. As we landed in a tangle of bushes, Edmund leaped out into them, calling to me to follow. Then the light streaming from the open window fell upon the most awful spectacle that a man ever lived to tell about.

The monster was within twenty feet of us, holding Jack high above the ground with the claws of two of its legs, and turning him round and round, as a spider prepares a fly for his meal.

The dreadful jaws were open to receive the morsel, when a stream of fire shot from Edmund's gun, followed instantly by half a dozen more.

The animal reeled, and its legs gave way, thrashing the bushes as it tumbled on its side.

Jack dropped like lead, and I rushed to his side, while Edmund pumped more shots into the huge

rolling body, whose struggles broke the intertwining branches with terrific crashes.

As I reached Jack he resembled a shapeless lump. Edmund rushed back as soon as he could to look at him.

CHAPTER XX

In the Whirlwinds of Venus

BUT the case proved, on examination, not to be so bad, after all. Jack was not dead, and the great beast was.

Still, the poor fellow seemed terribly injured. His clothing was ripped to shreds, and his face was disfigured. He had been rolled up almost into a ball; and I marveled when I saw him stretch out his legs, for I thought that every bone must have been broken.

His athletic training had, perhaps, saved him, his joints being supple and his muscles elastic.

"Just in time," he muttered, trying bravely to smile. "He had me in his jaws once, but I kicked away."

As we lifted him between us to carry him back to the car, Als approached, pushing his way with anxious face through the tangle of weeds and shrubs. Juha, his great eyes shining like flames, was close behind her.

Als uttered a cry of joy when she saw that we were safe, but her face was filled with pity as her eyes fell upon Jack. She helped Juha to open a way for us back to the car.

No sooner had we placed the injured man on the floor than she was on her knees beside him, striving to staunch the wounds on his face and hands. She and Edmund worked together as if they had been trained nurses.

They tore up garments to make bandages, and in a little while Jack looked like a patient in an emergency hospital. Fortunately, he seemed to have no internal injuries; and Edmund declared that, barring the possibility of poison from the fangs, there was no danger of a fatal result.

Jack's Courage

NEVERTHELESS he said, we must start on our return at once.

"Not on your life!" Jack exclaimed. "See here, Edmund, I won't go back. This expedition is not going to be ruined on account of such a little accident. It's just beginning to get interesting."

"But you may be poisoned," said Edmund.

"Stout and courageous!" returned Jack. "There's no poison about it. I tell you I won't go back. I'm not going to be scared out by a beast like that. You've finished him, and that ends it."

At first Edmund insisted; but Jack was so obstinate, and he really seemed so strong, that at length Edmund gave in:

"Well, we'll go on a little way. If Jack seems to be the worse for it, we'll put back again at top speed."

So it was decided, and we kept on.

No one had any desire to examine the monster we had slain. But Edmund declared that in the interests of science he ought at least to photograph him with a flash-light; and we did pause long enough

for that, hovering over the place with the car, but the picture when developed showed nothing but a blur.

No other adventure happened at once, and we saw no more of the strange inhabitants of the forest, who had probably been scared off by the noise and the light.

For a long time we bore away in the darkness, without any guide except a general sense of direction. In that respect Edmund was the most remarkable person I have ever known. It seemed impossible for him to be lost. He could make his way through the air like a migrating bird.

After a long while it began to grow a little lighter ahead. I thought that we had inadvertently turned on our course and were approaching the temperate zone; but Edmund averred that he had not lost his direction, and that the light must come from some other source. Before the darkness around us had begun perceptibly to lift I happened to glance out of one of the windows, and noticed a strange fluttering in the air.

Hugeinky shadows seemed to be flitting through the gloom.

Strange Shadows

PRESENTLY there came a smart blow against the car, and for an instant something covered the window. Everybody was greatly startled, and we looked out at both sides, but could see nothing, except the curious shadows that I had first noticed.

The air was misty around us; and the shadows, except for their blackness, resembled apparitions like the spirits of the Brocken, cut upon the dark fog by moving objects, whose position we could not immediately determine.

"There is something odd overhead," said Edmund at length, "and I'll steer a little higher to see what it is."

No sooner had the car started gliding on an upward slope than a perfect thunder of raps began on the outside, like heavy hail on a roof. At the same time both of the windows were covered by moving forms, the nature of which we could not determine, so fast did they fit by.

But it was evident that they were hitting the car and causing the noise. Suddenly the rattling ceased and the forms disappeared from the windows. But now again the thin shadows began fluttering in the mist all about the car.

"What has become of those things, and what are they, anyhow?" demanded Jack nervously. Owing to his comparative helplessness, he was no doubt more startled and alarmed than he would otherwise have been.

"I don't know what they are," Edmund replied; "but I do know that they are overhead again, and I'm going to keep the car rising until I find out what the mystery means."

"But what makes the shadows?" I asked. "Where does the light come from?"

"Of course it must come from above," Edmund replied, "since the shadows are below our level and appear all around us. I take it that the sun is breaking through the clouds overhead. But what the objects are that cast the shadows I can't guess. That they are very much alive, and that their name

is legion, are facts which require no demonstration after our recent experience."

All this time we were rising, and in a few moments the strange phenomenon recurred. The thunder of blows again fell upon the car, and the indistinguishable rush by the windows was resumed. Ale turned slightly pale, her maid's covered together. Henry hid his face, and even Edmund seemed disconcerted.

"It's very strange," he muttered. "I'll have to turn on the search-light."

A Flock of Birds

THIS had been extinguished upon the closing of the glass of the window when we resumed our journey. Edmund not taking the trouble then to replace the apparatus at the forward lookout. He now put the light in its original position, and, as its brilliant beam sprang out into the darkness, placed himself close by the small opening. After a moment of intense gazing he looked back over his shoulder with a queer expression.

Catching my eye, he beckoned to me, and I went to his side.

"Look out there!" he said in a low voice.

As I did so I was unable to repress an exclamation. The shaft of light fell upon thousands of huge flapping wings, belonging to what I can only liken to enormous bats, which were whirling about the car and blindly striking by hundreds against it, as they rushed on in an endless procession.

Soon it became apparent that they were revolving in a vast circle; and their previous sudden disappearance was explained when, as if at a signal, they all turned their flight upward and rose again above the level of the car.

The things looked so uncanny that I shuddered at the recollection of the sight, while Edmund seemed lost in thought.

"What is it?" called out Jack impatiently from his bench. "What do you see?"

While I was trying to frame an answer Edmund spoke up in words that filled me with surprise.

"It's the next step to Hades, I reckon," is what he said.

Jack didn't catch his drift, and I had to think a moment before I asked:

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean this," replied Edmund, seizing one of the knobs and giving it a sudden turn. "We've got to get up out of here before the tempest strikes us."

"You don't think that they can harm us, do you?" I said, with my mind on the flying creatures.

"Not they, but what they announce. Hold on tight now, for I am going to make her spin."

Before touching the knob again, he took Ale by the hand and made her sit on one of the benches, showing her how to hold herself firmly in position. Then he planted himself by his controllers, and a moment later we felt the car bound upward.

A Tempest on Venus

BUT the warning which Edmund had read in the conduct of the gigantic birds had come too late. We shot through their array, knocking them right and left by thousands as we rushed upward; but the deafening sound thus created was nothing to the awful uproar that immediately succeeded.

I turned dizzy as the car began to spin and plunge like a cork in a whirlpool.

We were caught in a tempest with a vengeance! It was getting lighter outside, but the light was more fearful than the darkness. It was a lurid red glow that made the boiling clouds which surged against the windows resemble foam upon a sea of blood whipped to madness by furiously battling winds.

All that we had experienced in the terrible passage of the crystal mountains was child's play to this!

The howling and shrieking of the wind was enough to drive one mad. It seemed to blow a dozen ways at once. The car rolled, bobbed, tossed, and plunged, and, despite all our efforts, we were flung upon the floor, striking against one another, grasping at supports, out of breath, helpless with terror, all shouting at intervals and nobody hearing a word in the hubbub of noises.

Edmund abandoned all efforts to control the car, and devoted himself to saving Ale as much as he could.

He held her in his arms, and braced himself in a corner where two of the benches running along the walls met. Even in that terrible excitement I noticed a look of confidence in her face as she fixed her eyes upon Edmund. Jack suffered fearfully from the shocks he received, and I did my best to aid him.

Once I caught Edmund's eye, and he glanced meaningfully upward, which I took for an intimation that the car was still rising, and that he looked for deliverance from our peril in that way. But there were certainly times when we plunged downward with fearful speed, for we would be almost lifted from the floor by the inertia.

This dreadful scene may have lasted an hour, or it may have lasted not more than twenty minutes; but it seemed endless. The change came with great suddenness.

One moment we were rolling and pitching, as usual, and the next—it was all over.

The Danger Over

THE car seemed to have been struck dead, it was so absolutely motionless. At the same instant the howling of the wind passed away in a dying scream. My ears rang still with the echo, and I was too dizzy to stand straight.

In a few moments it became evident that the motionlessness of the car was only apparent. We were still rising. Edmund gently placed Ale on a bench and went to the controllers. After turning a couple of knobs, he faced about with a cheering smile.

"We are out of it," he said. "There is no more danger. The only thing there was to do was to keep on rising. We are now above the denser part of the atmosphere, and the cyclones are whirling far beneath us. I will bring the car to rest, and if I am not mistaken you will look down upon a scene that you will not soon forget."

"I cannot open the air-tight glass shutters," he continued, "because at the elevation where we now are the air is too rare especially for Ale and her friends—but by inclining the car a little to one side we can have a good view."

There was an arrangement of movable weights

sliding upon bars to produce an inclination toward one side or the other; and in a few minutes Edmund had the car, which was now practically at rest, so canted that one of the large windows afforded a view almost directly downward.

An Amazing View from the Air

THE spectacle beneath drove the memory of an awful experience, for the moment, from the minds of all. The sun was shining brilliantly overhead, and its light fell upon a raging sea of clouds, which, except at their edges, where they were torn into flying sand, looked as dense as white molten metal.

A hundred tornadoes appeared to be whirling at once, all turning in the same direction with sickening velocity; and where these whirlwinds came together, their peripheries moving opposite ways, it was as if two gigantic buzz-saws had met, each plowing the other to pieces and whirling the fragments round in the wildest confusion. The play of lightning was fierce and incessant; but when we were in the midst of it, it had passed unnoticed, the thunder being blended with the roar of the wind.

"Good Heavens!" cried Jack, holding himself painfully erect at the window. "Did we come through that?"

"Indeed we did," replied Edmund, "and I don't mind saying that I shouldn't like to venture such a trip again."

"But what does it all mean?" I asked.

"Its meaning is clear enough. In penetrating toward the torrid circle, where the unsetting sun is forever in the zenith, we have entered the zone of tempests that surrounds it. The heated air is always rising above the area enclosed in the central circle and flowing off above on all sides.

"Colder air rushes in below to take its place; and at a certain distance from the center, which we have reached, the contending currents come together with the results that you see."

Ala, who had resumed all of her usual self-command, was one of the most eager of the watchers of this spectacle, and Edmund and she conversed together for a long time, pointing out and discussing the marvelous features of the scene.

At last I asked Edmund:

"What do you mean to do next? Go back?"

"No," he replied. "At least, we'll not go back the way we came. Having got so far, I think we'll circumnavigate the planet and take a bird's-eye look at it. Jack seems to be getting along pretty well, and by keeping near the upper limit of the atmosphere we can travel so fast that the whole trip will not occupy more than twenty-four hours."

"That's it," cried Jack; "that suits me exactly. To go back the way we came would look as if we had been beaten."

The talk of going back set my mind once more on the dangers that were probably gathering for us at the capital, and I could not refrain from saying quietly to Edmund:

"You know you ought to get back as soon as possible, for I am sure there are plots hatching that may have terrible consequences. Remember that the eagle-beak on the black throne is against us, and our absence with Ala leaves him a free field. Ingraham, too, is at liberty!"

But Edmund only smiled at my gloomy forebodings.

"You borrow too much trouble," he said.

But neither he in his buoyant optimism, nor I with my half-defined suspicions, foresaw what was coming.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Land of Night Again

ALTHOUGH the sun was now continually overhead and entirely unclouded, we did not suffer from its heat, because we were running at no great an elevation that the air was rarer than on the loftiest terrestrial mountain, and the rays that struck the outside of the polished car were reflected off without penetrating.

But on the planet below us, buried in its blanket of heavy air, the effect of the intense and unceasing solar radiation was terrific. We had already seen one of its results in the belt of cyclones, but as we passed over that and entered the central torrid circle, we beheld, if possible, still more dreadful indications of the merciless action of the sun.

When we had left the region of clouds and storms behind, the bare surface of the planet became visible, and Edmund kept one side of the car inclined downward to give us a better view from the window.

A Desert on Venus

WE were many miles above the ground, and the smaller details were not visible even with our binoculars; but we did not dare to drop lower because of the heat, which, in spite of our great distance, came to our faces, even through the thick glass, like the blast of a furnace.

Evidently, no life could exist on that scorched surface, and not a drop of water could stay there. Millions of square miles of land lay literally roasting, and the prevailing dark-brick color suggested the idea that it was red-hot.

There was no temptation to linger here, and in a short while we rose entirely above the atmosphere, in order, as Edmund said, to make it safe for him to turn the "interplanetary knob," and set the car going at a speed of more than a mile a second. In this way the transit of the torrid circle, though it was thousands of miles broad, was effected in an hour, and upon approaching the opposite border we saw again the ring of swirling clouds that encloses it all round.

Jack, who was now rapidly recovering the use of his limbs, stood with us most of the time at the windows, and as he saw the clouds passing far beneath, the thought seemed for the first time to strike his mind that in circumnavigating the planet we should once more visit the scene of our first adventure on the dark hemisphere.

"By Jove, Edmund," he suddenly sang out, "we'll have to cross those mountains again!"

"Of course we will," said Edmund, "but it will be a simple matter now. We'll go miles above their tops."

"And, hooray! We'll visit the caverns," Jack went on, with rising spirits. "Take, old boy," slapping him on the latter's hairy back, "you are going to see your old home once more, do you understand?"

But we won't leave you there. No, sirree! We can't part with you. I want to see you in New York once."

"But, if Juba should want to stay with his friends—" I began.

"Then, he'll have to stay," Edmund interrupted gravity. "And I am going to advise him to stay."

"Aw, Juba won't want to stay," said Jack, laughing. "He likes our company too well."

But Edmund's words and manner set me to worrying again about what was going on behind our backs at the capital; and I was impatient to return and have it out, and then get away for good.

Edmund saw the trend of my thoughts—I believe he was beginning to acquire something of Ala's power of mind-reading—and he said to me, in an aside:

"Don't be so down-hearted. It'll come out all right. Keep your courage up, and help me with the others."

We passed over the storm-zone at high speed, and then came the temperate, or inhabited, zone; but the part of it now beneath our eyes was on the opposite side of the planet from the capital. It appeared to be dotted with villages; and occasionally the towers of a considerable city were visible. Ala, however, informed Edmund that this portion of Venus was mainly devoted to agriculture, and contained no great towers. We were so high that the airplanes in sight seemed to be crawling upon the ground.

Leaving the Night Hemisphere

ANOTHER belt of clouds ahead soon reminded us that we were rapidly approaching the borders of the night hemisphere, and our expectations became eagerly alive. Ala, especially, was nervously excited over the prospect.

Now, at last, she was to enter that mysterious country which none of her people had ever succeeded in penetrating, and concerning which so many superstitions and traditions existed. The majestic majordomo, who had behaved with commendable equanimity through all of our adventures thus far, showed a little nervousness, I thought, when Ala explained to him what was about to happen. I watched Juba closely, but his face was impassive.

The night hemisphere, you will remember, is ringed outside the crystal mountains by another zone of tempests and a broad sea into which the rivers periodically formed by the melting ice pour. We were now so high that the storms did not trouble us; and we admiringly, at our leisure, the shining expanse of sea surface, whitened with foam, that showed through shifting breaks in the tempestuous clouds.

Presently, Edmund, who had been watching from the lookout, slowed down and swung the car half-way round.

"Now's your chance," he said. "Take a look at the mountains before we cross them."

We all crowded round the window. There they lay, those terrific ice peaks, in a long glittering line upon the horizon. Their tops were wreathed in straggling clouds, through which occasionally darted a diamond-bright flash where the level sunlight was reflected from some smooth flank of pure ice.

"I wonder if we can see the place where we were imprisoned by the fall of the car!" said Jack.

"No," Edmund replied. "That is over on the other side. Remember we are approaching the dark

hemisphere at a point opposite to where we left it."

"But the snow mountains seem just the same here."

An Arctic Cold on Venus

"TO be sure. Why shouldn't they be the same?"

The planet is completely ringed with them, for the moisture-laden air flows off equally on all sides of the globe."

We were already fast at such an elevation that we could clear the swells and the stony air that raged above their heads; and Edmund, after fifteen minutes' stoppage, resumed the journey. Gradually a marvelously scene opened around us.

The air seemed to darken, and the stars began to appear. These grew brighter as the night深ened, and soon they gleamed with ineffable brilliancy. It was so long since my eyes had beheld them, that I was astonished by their brightness and their multitude. But the effect upon Ala and her attendants was indescribable.

You must remember that none of them had ever seen a star before, and now suddenly they beheld thousands. They could not comprehend the meaning of the wonderful spectacle. It was such a revelation of the universe as they had never dreamed of.

When we had passed completely within the realm of darkness, with the crystal mountains now more flaming in fiery shapes behind us, Edmund brought the car to rest.

He had already started the electric heaters and clothed Ala in furs, and now the rest of us got out our arctic garments from the lockers.

"I am now preparing to drop down to the ground," Edmund said, "in order to take our bearings. A few observations of the stars will enable me to orient myself, and then we can set out with confidence in search of the cavern."

The descent was made rapidly, and then, in our warm clothing, we stepped out of the car upon the icy chink.

Ala shivered at the touch of the glacial air, and her maids and the majordomo quickly fled back into the shelter of the car. But Edmund wished Ala to remain outside, and he doffed the furs covering her until she intimated that she no longer felt any discomfort from the cold. Then he got out his instruments of observation.

But first he pointed out the earth and the moon to Ala. That was a thrilling moment to all of us!

How splendid our old planet looked up there, and how proud we felt as we watched Edmund endeavoring to make his companion comprehend what it was that she saw. I think that he succeeded, at least so far that she understood that it was our world which shone so splendidly overhead.

"Do you understand what this means?" asked Edmund, suddenly turning to me.

"I understand that that is the earth, of course," I replied.

"But, are you not surprised to find it still so high overhead here?"

Then the truth burst upon me.

A Year of the Venus Calendar

"WHY, yes!" I exclaimed; "it means that a whole year has elapsed since we arrived upon

Venus. She has gone round her orbit, and comes back into conjunction with the earth."

"More than a year," Edmund replied. "Some five hundred and eighty days; for that is about the time from one conjunction to the next."

"Do you mean to say that we have been here almost twenty months?" cried Jack.

"There is the evidence," Edmund responded. "Astrology doesn't lie."

"Well," said Jack, "it's the shortest twenty months in my experience."

Henry, after his fashion, said nothing, but looked gloomy and disgruntled in the glare of the electric light streaming from the car.

Having finished his observations, Edmund announced that he now knew his course and could take us directly to the caverns of Juba's people. But, before entering the car, he took Als again by the arm, and they stood together for a long time, gazing up at the earth and the stars, while he communed with her, telling her, in that strange language, I know not what marvelous things which must have been revelations of enormous significance to her intelligence.

I can see them yet, standing there side by side, and I can recall the very expression of her beautiful eyes, peering out of the hooding furs, as she drank in his thoughts, with a look of mingled love, and admiration, and confidence.

At length we reentered the car and, rising to a moderate elevation, resumed our journey at a rapid pace. The pathless frozen desert beneath us glistered occasionally in the starlight, and after a long time we caught sight of the well-remembered shafts of light rising from the ground.

"We are getting into the inhabited region," said Edmund. "We shall have to search a little for landmarks," he added, "because, of course, my observations are not as accurate as those of a geodetic survey, and I cannot locate the precise position of Juba's caverns. But I can come very close to them, and I depend upon Juba himself to aid in finding the exact spot."

Since our arrival in the dark hemisphere I had frequently studied Juba's countenance, and I detected many signs of the interest that the poor fellow experienced in finding himself once more in his own land. Still, it seemed to me that Jack was right, and that Juba would prefer to stay with us than to remain with his people.

The Caverns Once More

WE passed over several groups of inhabited caverns, but we saw no signs of life except the light shafts issuing upward.

We now ran close to the surface, and kept a sharp outlook. Suddenly Juba slapped his hairy hands with an expression of delight, and pointed to a row of lights which he seemed to recognize.

"That's it," said Edmund. "I was sure he would know when he was at home."

There was no mistake about it. Juba had recognized his own village, so to speak, probably by the arrangement of the shafts. In a little while, we ourselves became aware of a certain familiar aspect of the landscape, and, almost without hesitation, we approached the mouth of our own cavern. Then we

came softly down to the ground, and the door was thrown open.

"Hold on," said Jack. "Let's give them a surprise. Let's fire a gun in salute."

Edmund made no objection, and Jack, who had almost entirely recovered his activity, fired the signal.

As the sound rattled through the frozen air, we waited with great curiosity, standing within a few rods of the terrible altar on which I had nearly been sacrificed.

Presently, two or three hairy heads appeared at the cavern's mouth. Juba immediately ran toward them. They disappeared like frightened rabbits, and Juba dashed down the steps in pursuit. We halted at the top to let him soothe the fears of his compatriots. In a short time he reappeared with a dozen companions.

Evidently he had explained the situation, and I was rather surprised at the apparent indifference with which they greeted us. We seemed much more glad to see them than they were to see us. I recognized several well-known faces among them.

Then, accompanied by Als and her attendants, we descended, escorted by Juba, who seemed to take great pride in leading us. Arrived at the first underground apartment, we found a great crowd of the hairy natives assembled.

John Meets His Friends

THE women were more cordial in their greetings than the men, and seemed especially interested in Als and her maids. I expected to see some indications of concern over the fate of those who had been lost in the flood, but I observed none; and I do not really know whether or not any explanation of their absence was given by Juba.

While most of our party remained in this chamber, Edmund took Als and the majordomo on an exploration of the deeper parts of the cavern. Als expressed the greatest interest in everything she saw. Edmund told me that he showed her the marmime, the blacksmith shop, and all the curiosities of the place.

But there was no reason for lingering there, and as soon as Edmund had completed his circuit, preparations were made for our departure. Then Edmund took Juba aside and tried, as he had said he would, to persuade the fellow to remain with his own people. But Juba was deaf to all arguments; and at last Edmund, throwing up his hands, said:

"Well, it's no use. Juba is determined to go back with us; so we'll have to take him."

Poor Juba!

I often think of him now. How infinitely better it would have been for him if he had not been so fond of the strangers who had dropped into his gloomy world out of the starry sky!

CHAPTER XXII.

At the Capital

I NEED not detain you with an account of our return trip.

Edmund again laid his course by the stars, and running at a high elevation we passed over the crystal mountains and their warring tempests, believing that we could recognize with our glasses the

huge jeweled peak that had once so nearly wrought our destruction. Edmund pointed this out to Ala, as she clung to his arm; and then we crossed the sea where we had first met her, and were soon coursing under the great cloud-dome in the land of filtered sunshine.

Upon reaching the capital, the same scenes of jubilation were renewed; but there was great surprise at our reappearing from exactly the opposite direction to that in which we had been expected. An airplane was at once despatched to recall those who were waiting for us on the border of the twilight zone.

There can be no doubt that the forebodings which had so long occupied my mind tended to color my judgement, yet I would have sworn that I detected a change in the mazel atmosphere of the capital. Our greeting from the people was hearty, as usual, but there were faces which seemed to me to wear a half-concealed scowl; and I caught, occasionally, an unfriendly glance in the crowd.

These things impressed me so deeply that again I warned Edmund.

"The current is beginning to run against us," I told him. "I am sure of it."

This time he did not laugh at my fears. On the contrary, he said:

"Yes, I believe you are right. But I am not afraid. We have weathered worse storms."

"But, what will you do?"

"Let events take their course, and watch them."

"Then you may be too late. Listen to me. Prepare the car, get Ala's consent to go, for I believe she would follow you anywhere, and start for the earth at the earliest possible moment."

Edmund mused a little while; then he said:

"The day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow?" I replied impatiently. "Why trifle thus? You know that there are no days and to-morrows in this kind of endless light."

Edmund smiled.

"Count forty-eight hours by your watch," he said, "and at the end of that time, I promise you to start."

This promise heartened me immensely. But I did not know what that "day after to-morrow" had in store. The blow was nearer falling than I could have suspected.

It was hastened without doubt, by an occurrence which nobody could foresee or govern, and which, if it had happened at the time of our first arrival, would probably have had no mischievous consequences for us.

But, since that fatal interview in the temple, all was changed; and an event more disastrous for us than that which now occurred, Ingra himself could not have devised.

The Opening of the Cloud Dome

IT was the opening of the cloud-dome!

I have already told you that at certain unpredictable times a rift appeared in the pearly vault of the heavens, and the sun for a few minutes blazed down through the opening in unclouded splendor. So many years had elapsed since the last occurrence of this phenomenon, that for the younger generation it was only a tradition; yet it was a tradition

on which the pagan religious system—of which the eagle-faced sphinx in the red-lighted temple was the head-center—was based; and its influence upon the ignorant and superstitious multitude was unbounded and irresistible.

This terrible priest, whose hatred of us had, of course, been stimulated by Ala's open defiance, had, as I feared, occupied the time of our absence in poisoning as many minds as possible against us; and his sacred character had enabled him to spread the venom of religious prejudice with amazing rapidity. Even if we had not wasted time on our unfortunate expedition, I do not know that we could have done much to counteract his pernicious influence; but then, at least, we should have been ready at an earlier date to escape from his clutches.

And who knew what Ala, with her great popularity might have accomplished if she had been on the ground? I did not doubt for a moment that Ingra was in the capital, and thick in the plot.

The opening of the dome came very suddenly. It was announced by a great shout—rare occurrence—from the people who happened to be on the outer platforms of the palace tower.

We were all with Ala at the time, Edmund being engaged in trying to decipher the curious characters in a large book which she had brought him.

Upon hearing the shout, we all ran out.

The scene was one of the most unforgettable things that occurred in our whole expedition. Excited people were crowding the platforms, jostling one another, jabbering, pushing, and pointing upward; some already on their knees, others with looks of the utmost consternation, throwing their arms wildly above their heads, while hundreds of airplanes were circling like frightened birds above the towers.

The Venetians See the Sun

I glanced upward, following the direction of thousands of eyes, and was momentarily blinded by the fierce glare of the sun, pouring its unmitigated rays straight down through a narrow rift in the cloud-dome.

The gold and jewels that decorated the tower made it blaze with a splendor like that of a huge frost-bitten tree struck by the morning rays after a winter night's ice-storm. It was too dazzling to look upon.

Then there was a movement in the vast throng, a space cleared itself, and the gigantic Asur, wearing a great black miter flaming with circles of rubies and carbuncles, appeared, his strange beak projecting ominously and his black eyes aglow.

Thousands instantly dropped on their knees as he slowly advanced. With one long arm carrying a sort of crosier, he pointed aloft, while he intoned a chant that fell like a charm upon the superstitious multitude.

I glanced at Ala.

She did not stir; and I felt my heart give an exultant bound, with the conviction which flashed over me that her active, penetrating mind had flung off the burden of this superstition. How much Edmund had been able to teach her, I do not know; but I gave him all credit for the change.

Soon the terrible priest directed his meaning glance upon us, as we continued standing after all the others had abjectly fallen before him.

If his eyes had glared before, they turned to living flames now. With a majestic stride, he advanced toward Alz; and I thought for a moment that he meant to strike her down with his staff. Edmund pushed her behind him; and I shall never cease to thrill at the recollection that I, with a boldness that surprised and gratified me afterward, sprang impulsively to Edmund's side, with Jack—brave old Jack at my elbow.

What we should have done next I do not know for our enemy hesitated.

An Amazement

WHETHER he was cowered by our menacing aspect, or whether he thought it unbecoming his dignity to attack us physically, at any rate, he stopped short. Then, towering to his full height, he made one vast sweep with his arms, and covered us, I suppose, with a withering anathema.

As far as he was concerned, that apparently ended it.

He paid us no more attention after that than if we had been so many sticks, but directed his gaze straight at the sun. I saw its rays sparkle in the corner of his black eyes, which never winked; and I hope I may be forgiven for wishing, as I did, that his god would strike him blind on the spot!

As I glanced around, I caught side looks from the prostrate worshippers which boded no good.

Suddenly a cold hand seemed to have been planted over the pit of my stomach, for there, lifting his head above the kneeling crowd and staring at us with a wicked grin, was Ingra! An instant later, and before I could speak to Edmund, he was gone.

This capped the climax of my apprehensions. The mere fact that Ingra dared to show himself here attested the change that had occurred in our situation. After a moment's thought, I determined not to tell Edmund at present what I had seen.

The spectacle of the opening of the dome ended as unexpectedly as it had begun. The rift closed, and then, for a few moments, the contrast between the unclouded brilliancy of the sun and the soft glow that succeeded had an effect as if we had been plunged into night.

Finally, objects became clearer, there was a great movement of the closely packed throng, the people rose from their knees, and the black priest had gone as mysteriously as if he had been snatched up into the sky.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Blow Falls

AT THE scene that I have tried to describe in the last chapter, events hurried on with a rapidity which was not apparent upon their surface.

I believe that Edmund with all his prescience, failed to appreciate their meaning. In fact, he was himself responsible for giving them an impetus toward the inevitable crisis, which, but for the premature step that he and Alz took, might have been delayed considerably.

But I shall come to that in a few minutes.

As the excitement of the crowd died down, the people began to move about in groups, communing together about the marvel that they had witnessed.

The unfavorable attitude toward us was spreading among them.

It was plain that it had grown enormously in strength since the scene with the sugar, and the impression quickly reached those who had not been near enough to see for themselves.

I could not speak immediately to Edmund, because he was continually in conference with Alz; but getting Jack aside, in order not to alarm Harry, who was already in a pitiable state of moral collapse, I opened my mind to him.

"Jack," I said, "Edmund has promised to get away soon."

"Well, that'll be a good thing, I reckon," was the reply.

"What do you think of the sentiment of this crowd?"

"I shouldn't like to trust myself alone in it. But, say! Didn't we back the old medicine-man down in great shape?"

"I don't think we backed him down at all," I replied. "He has better ways of raining us than by attacking us with a big stick."

"Humph!" said Jack. "I've always had the drop on him, if he'd made another move."

"But you are in favor of our getting away at the earliest possible moment?"

"Oh, yes; I think we'd better go. We've had enough of Venus. But I'm not for backing down. If Edmund can take Alz along, all right. That's a little romance that's got to go through."

"We've got the religious sentiments of these people against us now," I said, "and we can't afford to stay an unnecessary minute."

The Danger Thickens

WILL their religious sentiments be hanged?" exclaimed Jack. "What's their religion? A set of pagans! But, by Jove, these girls of Venus are great. I only wish I could have had Edmund's luck."

"He may not be as lucky as he seems," I replied. "But, come, Jack, I want you to help me persuade Edmund to start even sooner than he has promised—in fact, right away."

Jack stared at me a moment.

"See here, Albert," he said. "I'm with you in thinking that the sooner we're off the better, but I'm not for budging a step until Edmund gives the word. He knows his affairs and Alz's."

"When they're ready, off we go, as far as I'm concerned. But that girl has got to be left to choose her time; and if Edmund wants to stay and become King of Venus, I'm not the man to coax him away."

There was no more to be made out of Jack. I thought it would do no good to tell him that Ingra was here, for probably he would be all the more eager to stay and fight it out.

At the first opportunity, however, I brought Edmund back to the subject of getting away. He saw what was in my mind before I could speak.

"What does your watch say?" he asked good-naturally. "Is it day after to-morrow yet?"

"No, of course not; but listen, Edmund. Don't you see how the peril thickens around us? I protest that I am no coward; but it would be defying fate to stay here any longer. Can't you persuade Alz to go at once?"

Edmund paused a minute before replying; and

then be said, with some embarrassment of manner:

"I promised you to start in forty-eight hours. I thought that it could be managed, else I shouldn't have promised; but things have taken another turn. Als refuses to go; and you know," laying his hand on my arm, "that I can't leave her."

Edmund's Despairfulness

BUT what do you propose, then; to stay here all your life?"

"That's it!"

There was no trace of regret in his tone. It was plain that henceforth this, and not his mother earth, was to be Edmund's world.

Before I could say anything in reply, he went on:

"But, of course, I don't mean to keep you and Jack and Henry here. I am going to show you exactly how to manage the car; and I feel sure that you can navigate her home as well as I could myself."

The idea of parting from Edmund, of leaving him alone on this distant planet while we returned to the earth, had never crossed my mind. Now, coming so suddenly, it quite overwhelmed me.

I had long ago forgotten to feel the least resentment because he had practically kidnapped us and brought us away off here against our knowledge and against our will. It seemed to me like desertion to leave him, and I could not reconcile myself to the thought.

I felt a lump rising in my throat; and it would not surprise me if there were tears in my eyes.

"But, Edmund, I finally managed to say, "you can't stay, you know, and Als can't stay. The lives of both of you will be sacrificed. Your enemies are too numerous and too powerful."

"No," he replied cheerfully. "We shall run no great danger. Als believes that she can stem the tide; and I believe it, too, for there never was another such a woman! She proposes that we meet the machinations of the chief priest with a counterstroke."

"What sort of counterstroke can you deal?"

"You know how popular Als has always been, and you know also how charmed the whole population was with the news of our romance. It is the ingrained nature of these children of the sun. They passionately love the romantic and the beautiful.

"We believe that we can overcome the opposition of the superstitious element and rouse enthusiastic devotion to ourselves, by publicly proclaiming our betrothal, and celebrating our nuptials at the earliest possible moment; and we are going to do it."

I was struck dumb—the thing was so unexpected and, to my mind, so preposterous.

"Why, Edmund!" I at last managed to say, "that's the very thing to bring your enemies down upon you."

"If you are determined to stay here on Venus, all right. For Heaven's sake don't take a step so openly defiant as that which you propose. Keep in the background, and get Als to try her arts of persuasion until the storm blows over."

Nothing that I could urge moved him. He and Als had made up their minds, and that was the end of it.

He wound up the discussion by asking me to go at once to the car, in order that he might instruct

me in the management of the controllers. Als, as well as Jack, Henry, and Juba, accompanied us.

The mere knowledge of Ingria's presence was sufficient to make Edmund wish to have Als continually under his eye; and the others followed where they saw us going. The lesson was not long, for already I had a general idea of the management of the machinery; but it was rendered a little difficult by the tacit understanding between Edmund and me that Henry should not be told what was in the wind.

He would be glad enough to go home, but we were sure that he would oppose any one acting as engineer except Edmund. The affair was managed without exciting Henry's suspicion. Afterward, I got Jack aside and told him the whole story.

As I expected, he adopted Edmund's view at once.

"Just the thing to do," he declared. "But, I tell you what, I'm more than half disposed to stay here myself, if Edmund does."

"Do as you like, Jack," I replied; "but I'm going to get away just as soon as I am certain that Edmund and Als cannot, after all, be persuaded to go, and that they are in no immediate danger."

You are not to suppose, from what I have said, that Als was deserted by her people in the midst of the serious trouble in which she and we had involved ourselves. Her self-confidence, as exhibited in the plan which she had formed with Edmund, was alone a sufficient indication that she had plenty of friends left, and that her rank and character still protected her.

The Betrothal

AS soon, then, as she had informed those friends and faithful supporters of her design, they loyally aided her to put it into execution. At a less anxious moment I should have eagerly examined into all the details of the singular ceremony by which the betrothal of the queen to a stranger of another race and from another world was to be proclaimed to her people. As it was, my mind was too full, and only the culminating scene was stamped on my memory.

The immense palace-tower and hundreds of other towers all over the city were decorated so we had never seen them before. The display of color was amazing, even after our experience.

Most beautiful of all, I thought, was the spectacle presented by the thousands of airships and airships in gain dress. They spiraled about, so countless and so brilliant, so swift and so graceful in their many circling, that one seemed to be plunged into the midst of a vast swarm of the most gorgeous butterflies.

So dazzling and fascinating a spectacle was never conceived by the most ingenious inventor of carnival and ballets.

But even while I stood admiring it I could not drive away the thought that this wonderful display was, in itself, simply a defiance to our enemies, the waving of the tormentor's scarlet flag, and I shuddered at consequences which I could not foresee.

The hour for the final ceremony was now close at hand, and we were all to take a conspicuous part in it, standing with Als and Edmund to receive the congratulations of the people, after a priest, whom

Ala had won over to her side, had publicly proclaimed their betrothal.

Ala, beautiful as I had never yet seen her, was already habited in white garments glittering with diamonds, and Edmund had been fitted out in appropriate dress which splendidly set off his magnificent figure, with a jeweled fillet resting amid his dark curly hair.

Preparing to Return to the Earth

WHILE we waited thus in one of the upper apartments of the palace-tower an irresistible impulse came to me to examine the car, which had been removed to a neighbouring tower. I do not know why I suddenly felt this desire—it may have been some suspicion of possible meddling by Ingra—but, at any rate, I immediately yielded to it.

I had a key to the chamber in which the car was locked, and I said to Edmund, who was in high spirits:

"I want to run over to look at the car."

"All right," he replied, "but you must be back in a quarter of an hour, without fail."

"I'll be back," I responded, and summoned an air-boat waiting at the landing.

Jack and Henry at once expressed a desire to accompany me, and I consented. We were not a minute in crossing the space separating the palace from the adjoining tower, and while Jack and Henry remained on the landing of the latter, admiring the scene before them, I approached the locked chamber containing the car. As I put the key in the door I asked myself:

"What am I here for? I'm hanged if I know. But, anyhow, I'll take a look."

I opened the door and entered. The car was apparently all right, and, while I was looking it over with no particular design, I heard Jack's voice raised in great excitement.

I ran to the door, and a gush of heat smote me in the face. A single glance showed me that the palace was in flames! Vast tongues of fire were leaping up from its lower stories, licking the innumerable brilliant balconies, which burst into flame as if they had been so much tinder.

Stunned for an instant by the awful sight, the next moment I leaped into the air-boat, pushing Jack and Henry before me, but even as we did this the material of the boat caught fire, and its engineer sprang back upon the platform of the tower.

"Quick!" I shouted. "We must get the car out."

We dashed into the apartment containing it, and now the value of Edmund's recent instructions was shown. But for then I should never have been able to manage it in such an emergency.

Madly we pushed it out into the furnace of hell, for our own tower had caught fire, and, as we sprang inside, I turned on the power. We rose like a shot out of the flame and smoke.

Immediately I swung round on the other side of the palace opposite to that where we had been. Here, as I hoped, the flames had not yet mounted to the level that they had attained on the other side. But a sight met my eyes that, for a moment, drove me mad with rage.

The Conflagration

THREE, with a single steersman in an air-boat, I was Ingra, torch in hand, spreading the conflagration! Forgetting in my fury what I had come for, I drove the car straight against him. He turned with startled eyes, and saw us bearing down upon him. He read death in my face, and his own grew pale.

Desperately he endeavored to evade the encounter, but the steel car struck his boat like a ram, crushed in its side, and sent Ingra and his unfortunate companion spinning into the flames below.

I exulted over the deed! I felt an unholy joy in having at last wrought vengeance upon this monster.

Then the thought of the time I had lost flashed upon me like an accusation.

"In Heaven's name!" I cried. "We must save Edmund and Ala!"

"And Juba!" shouted Jack.

I turned the car, and sped for the platform on which I knew that they must be.

We saw them! But—Heaven forgive me!—we were too late!

My vengeance had been purchased at an awful price. A minute earlier we might have saved them, but now they were in the midst of the flames. Edmund had Ala in his arms, and Juba, his long hair catching the sparks, stood resolutely beside them.

Edmund saw me, and, as I live, he smiled. He opened his lips, but in the awful roar of the fire I could not hear his voice.

Then he raised his hand, and seemed to be waving us off. He pointed upward, as if commanding us to go.

"We save them yet!" I yelled between my set teeth, and rushed the car into the flames.

But at this instant the whole vast structure of the tower gave way.

It crumbled like a pile of ashes, and they were gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Earth

FOR a few minutes after this terrible conflagration none of us spoke a word. Henry had swooned. Jack stood motionless by my side.

Where the tower had been, and the leaping flames had raged, was a vast vacancy, with wreaths of smoke rising from far below.

The conflagration was now spreading all over the splendid city. A hundred towers were bursting fiercely on all sides, the painted flames licking the sky, and thousands of planes and air-ships that had also caught fire were dropping like flaming brands into the furnace.

The sight filled me at once with pity and with horror. I saw one large plane, filled with people, driven, in spite of the exertions of its engineer, directly over a burning tower. A long spire of flame reached up and touched it. It seemed to shrivel like a moth in a candle, and down it went with all its living freight.

"Get away from here!" cried Jack, at last recovering his voice.

I turned the car and we sped away.

For hours we rushed on, not particularly to choose

our direction. Our only thought was to escape from this dreadful place. At last I slowed down to take our bearings.

We had left the doomed capital behind the horizon, and only the well-known expanse of land beneath, with a few airships sailing about over it, and the cloud-domes above our heads, reminded us that we were still on the planet Venus.

Back to Earth

I BROUGHT the car to rest and sat down with Jack to consult. We looked at each other for a time in silence. Then we both burst into tears.

When we recovered ourselves we got out some provisions and set the little table on which Edmund had served our first morning meal after leaving the earth. We were ravenous with hunger, but it was a sad repast.

Henry had to be forced to eat a few mouthfuls, for he was yet out of his head and kept up his strange mutterings. When the meal was finished Jack and I decided upon our course.

"There is no reason for staying here another hour," I said. "We must start at once for the earth."

"But are you sure that you can manage the car in open space?" Jack eagerly inquired.

"Yes; Edmund told me everything that needs to be done," and my eyes filled with tears as I spoke.

"Then let us go," said Jack solemnly.

We rose swiftly through the cloud-dome, and once more the magnificent spectacle of the great white globe was before us. As rapidly as possible I accelerated the speed of the car, and the huge planet seemed to sail away into space.

Once above the atmosphere the heavens turned black and the stars sprang out to view. There was the earth again shining brilliantly, with the moon close at her side, and I set our course for them.

After a while the indicator showed a speed of twenty miles a second.

"I hardly dare to work it up higher," I said, "but since Venus and the earth are now again in conjunction, the distance we have to travel is only about twenty-six million miles, and we can make it in a little over eleven and a half days."

"And the meteors?" suggested Jack.

"We shall have to trust to luck," I replied.

Oh, what a trip that was!

Our hearts were filled with sadness, for, upon my word, we thought more of Edmund and Alis and Julia than of the home to which we were returning.

Henry added to our trouble, for his mind became every hour more clouded. At length he grew violent in his insanity, and sometimes we were obliged to use force to prevent him from injuring himself.

We had arrived, according to my calculations, within a quarter of a million miles of the earth, and already we could begin to see many of its geographical features, when a crisis arose in Henry's case.

He had been quiet for a long time, and we had ceased to watch him as carefully as we should have done, when, quite unexpectedly, he was seized with a maniacal fit, and before a hand could be laid upon him he had thrown open one of the windows and precipitated himself out of it.

The First Death

HE leaped with such force that he shot several yards away from the car. I realized in a flash that he had gone to his death, for we could not recover him before his breath would be exhausted. It was necessary instantly to close the window, because the air was rushing out, and in a few seconds it would be all gone, and we could not replace it. The apparatus which Edmund had provided automatically purified the air in the car, and rendered it fit to be breathed over and over again for an indefinite time, but there was no means of making more air.

Already in the few seconds that the window had remained open the larger part of our supply of air had escaped, and the moment we had slammed the window back into its air-tight settings Jack and I gasped and sank almost helpless on the floor.

For several minutes we were unable to rise. At last I struggled to my feet and looked out of the window.

There floated Henry's body, accompanying us in our flight!

"Oh, Jack!" I said faintly. "I cannot hear this!"

"What is it?" he managed to whisper, painfully lifting himself to the window.

The instant he looked out he dropped back to the floor with a groan.

The thought of Henry following us was too horrible to be entertained. Desperately I turned a guiding wheel, and the car moved away on a different course. But with fascinated eyes I continued to watch the body of our friend until, a mere speck, it faded into the blackness of the sky.

Poor Henry! He had chosen a strange tomb, as deep as the heavens and as lasting. I shuddered at the thought that there he would continue to float forever, imperishable in germinal space, unless, perhaps, his mother earth should draw him at last to her bosom, when, flashing for an instant with meteoric fire, his ashes would be scattered unperceived through the wide atmosphere.

The desperation of the situation in which I now found myself it is impossible to put into words. Jack, whose stoutness doubtless served to diminish his breathing capacity, continued lying on the floor, gasping and half asphyxiated. I myself was as weak as a child, yet I had to guide the car.

The End of Jack

WITHOUT thought of anything but the necessity of reaching the earth, or at least of getting within the limits of the atmosphere, at the earliest possible moment, I recklessly increased the speed. A few minutes' time saved might mean life for Jack. When I spoke to him he could not reply, but I saw that he was still breathing.

How that car did spin!

Before I was aware that we were so near I suddenly perceived a vast dark mass filling all the sky that was visible from the window. The earth! At last we were almost there. We must be at the upper limit of the atmosphere, and I dared not continue that speed any longer.

I slowed down as rapidly as I could, and not a minute too soon, for I could feel heat coming through the walls of the car, and at the same moment the stout glass in one of the windows cracked

(Continued on page 669)

A Columbus of Space

By GARRETT P. SERVISS

(Continued from page 613)

with a loud report. We were already in the rare upper air, and the friction of our swift rush through it had begun to intame the steel.

In a few moments more, I thought, I could throw open a window and let in fresh air to revive Jack and to restore my own strength.

But alas! Jack was already beyond all help. When I had opened the window and drawn one refreshing breath, I turned to him and found him pulseless.

It is a wonder that I did not go mad myself. I had brought the car almost to rest, and now it slowly settled until it lay motionless. I was at home at last—but what a home-coming!

Long I sat, discouraged and desperate, with bitter thoughts, and Jack lying there before me. Finally a soft breeze stealing into the open window roared me.

The electric lights were glowing in the car, but as I opened the door I found that it was night outside. I turned back and looked once more at Jack.

He lay as peaceful as a sleeping child. I could hear it no longer. I turned off the light and emerged from the car.

It had landed in a swamp. Straggling trees covered with wild grape-vines were all about.

New York Again

HEEDLESS of where I went, I began to run. Several times I fell headlong, but, recovering my feet, went on. After several hours I found a hunter's deserted hut and entered it. Tired out, I lay down there and slept until the morning sun awoke me.

It is needless to detail all that followed.

I found out that the car had come down in the very heart of the Adirondack wilderness. I occupied a whole day in walking to an inhabited clearing. When I arrived there I had made up my mind what to do. I would keep the secret.

As soon as I could reach New York I hunted up Church. His amazement upon seeing me was boundless. He had long believed that we were all dead. But he agreed with me to keep the secret. Together we went to the Adirondacks, found the car after a week's search, buried Jack's body under a great pine tree, and labored for two whole days to sink the sunken car forever from the sight of men in the mud of the swamp.

Now at last I have told the story, and the world knows what a genius it lost in Edmund Stonewall.

THE END.

Readers' Vote of Preference

STORY

REMARKS

(1)

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(2)

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(3)

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